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**The Making and Possessing of Quality:  
The Metalware Trades in England c. 1675-1785**

**by**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy in History

University of Warwick, Department of History

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# Contents

List of Illustrations .....	i
List of Tables .....	v
Acknowledgements .....	vi
Declaration .....	vii
Abstract .....	viii
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
i.1    The Historical Context of Metalware .....	2
i.2    Literature Review .....	11
i.3    The Making and Possessing of Quality .....	19
i.4    Sources and Methodology .....	24
i.5    Chapter Outline .....	30
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	
<b>The Guild and State Regulation of Metalware .....</b>	<b>35</b>
1.1    The Guilds and their Authority .....	37
1.2    Aims and Motivations .....	41
1.3    Products .....	43
1.4    People .....	51
1.5    Processes .....	61
1.5.1  The Assay Process .....	62
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	
<b>Flexible Regulations in the Expansion of the Trade.....</b>	<b>80</b>
2.1    A Decline in the Guilds? .....	82
2.2    Resistance .....	88
2.3    Petitions .....	95
2.4    Circulation of Knowledge of Regulation .....	100

### **CHAPTER 3**

<b>A New Taxonomy of Goods: The Expansion and Diversification of the Metalware Trade .....</b>	<b>111</b>
3.1    The Emergence of Birmingham and Sheffield .....	112
3.2    Producers and Manufacturers .....	119
3.3    New Products and Materials .....	123
3.4    Innovation .....	135
3.5    Value .....	144

### **CHAPTER 4**

<b>Moving People, Products and Processes: The Relationship between London, Birmingham and Sheffield .....</b>	<b>155</b>
4.1    The Movement of People .....	157
4.2    Subcontracting and the Expanding Places of Production ...	161
4.3    The Movement of Patterns and Products .....	169
4.4    Producing Quality .....	184

### **CHAPTER 5**

<b>The Importance of Reputation: Manipulating Consumer Demand and the Regulation of the Trade.....</b>	<b>191</b>
5.1    Individual and Collective Reputation .....	194
5.2    The Importance of Reputation for Regulation .....	204
5.3    The Places of Quality Production .....	207
5.4    The Petition for New Assay Offices .....	214
5.5    Manipulating Reputation .....	221
5.6    The Impact of Reputation .....	227

### **CHAPTER 6**

<b>The Advertising and Marketing of Quality Metalware .....</b>	<b>233</b>
6.1    Advertising in the Eighteenth Century .....	236
6.2    Marketing the New and the Old .....	241
6.3    The Language of Quality .....	246
6.4    Retailing .....	250
6.5    Product Range .....	255

6.6	Production .....	261
6.7	Innovation .....	267
6.8	Fashion .....	273
 <b>CHAPTER 7</b>		
	<b>Emphasising Quality and Novelty in the Retailing and Distribution of Metalware .....</b>	<b>279</b>
7.1	Displaying Metalware .....	282
7.2	The Shop .....	288
7.3	Retail Networks .....	294
7.3.1	Hawkers and Pedlars .....	299
7.3.2	Auctions .....	302
7.3.3	The Second-hand Trade .....	307
7.4	Selling .....	310
7.5	Guaranteeing Quality .....	313
 <b>CHAPTER 8</b>		
	<b>Consumer Knowledge: Possessing, Inspecting and Maintaining Quality .....</b>	<b>321</b>
8.1	Assessing Quality .....	325
8.2	Knowledge of Production .....	326
8.3	Knowledge of Regulation .....	336
8.4	Inspection and Consumer Knowledge .....	342
8.5	Possessions .....	343
8.6	Consumer Demand for Metalware .....	347
8.7	Aesthetic Value, Fashion and Taste .....	350
8.8	Social Value .....	355
8.9	Scientific and Material Knowledge .....	358
8.10	Re-fashioning and Repair .....	363
 <b>CONCLUSION .....</b>		<b>371</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>		<b>378</b>

## List of Figures

Figure i.1: Sugar Basin, Sterling Silver and Glass, Boulton and Fothergill, 1776, Birmingham Assay Office, S0338.	29
Figure 1.1: Chart Depicting the Aims and Mechanisms of Guild Control in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century England.	42
Figure 1.2: Sauce Boat, Pewter, Henry Joseph, London, c. 1780, Victoria and Albert Museum, M.101-1945.	47
Figure 1.3: Touchplate of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, from Charles Welch, <i>History of The Worshipful Company of Pewterers of the City of London</i> , Volume II (London: Blades, East & Blades, 1902), Appendix.	53
Figure 1.4: Register of Persons Concerned in the Manufactory of Goods Plated with Silver, 1784, in <i>Register of Makers Marks</i> (Sheffield: Sheffield Assay Office, from 1773), 90.	56
Figure 1.5: Salt Cellar, Sterling Silver, Morton, Warris, Winter and Roberts, Sheffield, 1773, Sheffield Assay Office.	63
Figure 1.6: Love Cup, Britannia Standard Silver, 1699, Sheffield Millennium Gallery, L.1927.3.	64
Figure 1.7: Notes Regarding Parcels Sent for Assay, Sheffield City Archives, SAO 2/2/1/2.	69
Figure 1.8: Candlestick, Sterling Silver, Thomas Law, 1765, Sheffield Assay Office.	72
Figure 1.9: William Badcock, <i>A Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares</i> (London: Printed for John Bellinger and Thomas Bassett, 1677), 39.	75
Figure 2.1: Plate-Warmer, Pewter, Sheffield Millennium Gallery, L.1938.316.	92
Figure 2.2: The <i>London Gazette</i> , Issue 1768 (26 October 1682), 2.	104
Figure 2.3: William Badcock. <i>A Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares</i> (London: Printed for John Bellinger and Thomas Bassett, 1677).	106
Figure 2.4: William Badcock, <i>A New Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares</i> (London: Printed and Sold by W. Freeman, 1708).	107

Figure 3.1: Chart Showing the Proportion of Hardware Goods that were Exported to Different Countries from Britain in 1786.	118
Figure 3.2: Pair of Candlesticks, Silver with Sheffield Plate Nozzles, Boulton and Fothergill, 1768, Birmingham Assay Office, S1140.	127
Figure 3.3: <i>The Book of Trades or Library of Useful Arts</i> , Part III, Third Edition (London: Tabart and Co., 1805).	137
Figure 3.4: Sauce Boats, Sterling Silver, John Hoyland and Co., 1773, Sheffield Assay Office.	139
Figure 3.5: Pair of Salts, Sterling Silver, John Parsons and Charles Hall, 1777, Sheffield Assay Office.	140
Figure 3.6: Taper Candlestick, Sheffield Plate, Boulton and Fothergill, 1770, Sheffield Millennium Gallery, L.1943.97.	142
Figure 4.1: Birmingham Brass Catalogue, 1780, in T.R. Crom, <i>Trade Catalogues 1542-1842</i> (Melrose, 1989), 190.	170
Figure 4.2: Pattern Book 1, Boulton and Fothergill, Late-Eighteenth Century, Birmingham City Archives, Microfilm A621.1.	173
Figure 4.3: Card of 17 Buttons, c. 1800, The National Archives, EXT 11/19.	176
Figure 4.4: Trade Card of Hobday, Biddle and Ryder, c. 1750-1800, Victoria and Albert Museum, E.46-1949.	179
Figure 5.1: Waiter, Pewter, Thomas Bancks, 1685, Victoria and Albert Museum, M.984-1926.	198
Figure 5.2: Candlestick, Brass and Iron, George Grove, Birmingham, c. 1748-68, Winterthur Museum, 1961.0830.001.	201
Figure 5.3: Skillet, Bronze, John Fathers, Somerset, England, c. 1700, Victoria and Albert Museum, M.100-1920.	202
Figure 5.4: Plate, Pewter, 1666, Sterling Smith Museum and Art Gallery.	208
Figure 5.5: Piano Candlesticks, Sterling Silver, Makepiece and Carter, 1776, Sheffield Assay Office.	211
Figure 5.6: Pair of Candlesticks, Silver, Robert Jones, 1774, Sheffield Assay Office.	226

Figure 6.1: Trade Card of George and John Deane, c. 1800, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/DEANE.	238
Figure 6.2: Bill-Head of George and John Deane, c. 1800, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/DEANE.	240
Figure 6.3: Trade Card of John Bright, c. 1796, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/BRIGHT.	253
Figure 6.4: Trade Card of Joseph Powell, 1776, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/PCC/POWELL.	257
Figure 6.5: Trade card of Richard Boulton, c. 1760-1818, British Museum, D2.1692.	258
Figure 6.6: Trade Card of W. Baker, c. 1800, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/BAKER.	263
Figure 6.7: Trade Card of Stewart, c. 1795, British Museum, D2.1777.	265
Figure 6.8: Pattern Book 2, Boulton and Fothergill, Late-Eighteenth Century, Birmingham City Archives, Microfilm A 621.1.	269
Figure 6.9: Sauce Boat, Sheffield Plate, 1780, Victoria and Albert Museum, M.314-1912.	270
Figure 6.10: Trade Card of William Smith, c. 1765, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/SMITH.	275
Figure 6.11: Trade Card of Thomas Gardner, c. 1780, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/GARDNER.	275
Figure 7.1: Trade Card of Scudamore, Cutler of Birmingham, c. 1790-1818, British Museum, Heal,52.94.	284
Figure 7.2: Bill-Head of Folkard, c. 1800, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/FOLKARD.	285
Figure 7.3: Trade card of Robert Peirce, c. 1758, British Museum, Heal,95.27.	289
Figure 7.4: Chatelains, Gilt-Metal, Boulton and Fothergill, c. 1765, Soho House Museum.	290
Figure 7.5: Trade Card of Phillips Garden, c. 1750, British Museum, Heal,67.156.	291
Figure 7.6: Plate 11 from <i>The Twelve Cries of London</i> , Etching by Paul Sandby, 1760, Museum of London, 61.39/11.	300



Figure 7.7: Trade Card of John Flude, 1780, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/FLUDE.	308
Figure 7.8: Trade Card of Henry Patten, c. 1760, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/PATTEN.	316
Figure 8.1: Hepinstall's Mill for Grinding Files and File Manufactory, in James Bisset, <i>Bisset's Magnificent Guide, or, Grand Copperplate Directory, for the town of Birmingham</i> (Birmingham: R. Jabet, 1808).	332
Figure 8.2: Pieter van Roestraten, <i>Still Life with Silver Tankard</i> , Oil Painting, England, c. 1700, Victoria and Albert Museum.	338
Figure 8.3: Covered Cup, Old Sheffield Plate, c. 1760, Sheffield Millennium Gallery, 1977.695.	341
Figure 8.4: William Badcock, <i>A New Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares</i> (London: Printed and Sold by W. Freeman, 1708), Frontispiece.	361
Figure 8.5: Candlestick and Snuffer, Sterling Silver, Fenton, Creswick and Watson, 1772, Sheffield Assay Office.	368

## List of Tables

Table 3.1: A Table Outlining the Important New Materials Developed Within the Metalware Trades in the Late-Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.	129
Table 6.1: What was Advertised on Metalware Trade Cards, c. 1710-1800.	247
Table 6.2: What was Advertised on Trade Cards, Divided between Luxury and Hardware Metalware Trade Cards, c. 1710-1800.	248
Table 6.3: Number of Trades Listed on Metalware Trade Cards and Bill-Heads, c. 1710-1800.	259

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## **Declaration**

I confirm that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

## **Abstract**

This thesis considers the historical evolution of the concept of quality of manufacture by analysing a key sector and product in the British economy in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the production of metal goods (silver, copper and new alloys) for which towns such as Birmingham and Sheffield became well known nationally and internationally. It builds upon recent research that argues that quality was a convention, which was debated and deliberated at different points in time and in particular cultural contexts. By analysing a range of sources, from documentary evidence to popular literature, visual sources and artefacts, this thesis argues that the expansion of the trade led to changes in the regulation of the metalware trade, in which the guilds had to rely on consumers and the public to report substandard metalware. This change co-existed with the increasing consumer interest in novelty, innovation and production, and led to the circulation of knowledge about quality between regulator, producer and consumer. Therefore, regulators and producers remained influential in the deliberation of quality. Although there was the increasing importance of novelty and fashionability, the regulated intrinsic value of metalware remained central to the perception of quality.

# Introduction

England, in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, witnessed innovation and invention in the metalware trades. During this period, many metal industries experienced peaks in popularity, others fell out of favour, and some were seen for the first time, born out of what has been defined as an ‘age of manufactures’.<sup>1</sup> Metalware manufacturers expanded their activities, increased in number, and developed their national and international reputation. They worked with an expanding range of workers and subcontractors to respond to increasing demand for consumer goods, and developed new products, materials and designs. Research has focused upon the role of regional manufacturing towns such as Birmingham and Sheffield, whose production significantly expanded making these centres well known for innovation in the metalware trade.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis shows that the expansion of the metalware trade impacted on all aspects of the trade, from its regulation, to production, retail and consumption. As a result, it sparked new debates about product quality, in which regulators, producers

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<sup>1</sup> Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures, 1700-1820: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1994), 280. The popularity of silver remained relatively consistent throughout the period, but pewter experienced its ‘golden age’ at the end of the seventeenth century and went into a period of decline thereafter. New materials, such as Sheffield plate and pinchbeck became increasingly popular as there was an increasing demand for novelty and innovation. Christopher Peal, *Pewter of Great Britain, for Pleasure and Investment* (London: John Gifford, 1983), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Peter M. Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, Technology and Culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); and Maxine Berg, “Commerce and Creativity in Eighteenth-Century Birmingham,” in *Markets and Manufacture in Early Industrial Europe*, ed. Maxine Berg (London: Routledge, 1991), 173-204.

and consumers were all involved in the deliberation of quality. This thesis argues that the widening places of production caused a shift in the regulation of the trade, in which the guilds and state turned to the public to report substandard metalware. This expansion co-existed with the introduction of new products and materials, and an increased consumer interest in production, which increased the importance of aesthetic value, novelty and fashionability. However, because of the adaptability of the guild system, and the materiality of metalware that made its material composition difficult to detect, intrinsic value remained crucial in the perception of quality. Instead of reducing the influence of regulators or producers, they used this shift to their advantage, and communicated with the public to influence their perception of quality, to re-enforce their place in this shifting understanding of quality, and to provide consumers with the knowledge to inspect, test and understand the quality of their metalware.

### **i.1 The Historical Context of Metalware**

The period covered by this thesis, from the late-seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century, was a time of transition. Prior to this period, metalware - especially silver - was seen as a form of inherited wealth and value storing.<sup>3</sup> In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was the increasing availability of metalware, and the

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<sup>3</sup> Bruno Blondé and Ilja Van Damme, “Fashioning Old and New or Moulding the Material Culture of Europe (Late Seventeenth-Early Nineteenth Centuries),” in *Fashioning Old and New: Changing Consumer Patterns in Western Europe, 1650-1900*, ed. Bruno Blondé, Natacha Coquery, Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 9.

emergence of new products and materials that appealed to a wider consumer market.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, the nineteenth century saw the expansion of the toy and jewellery trades, especially in Birmingham, but it went into decline by the end of the century.<sup>5</sup> There was therefore a unique historical context to the late-seventeenth- and eighteenth-century metalware trade in England, with its expanding range of metalware, places of production and influential actors.

### **i.1.1 The Metalware Trades**

This thesis engages with a wide range of metalware that co-existed in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from expensive luxury goods in silver and gold, to everyday items in brass and pewter, and new innovations in Sheffield plate, ormolu and pinchbeck, all of which circulated alongside a thriving second-hand market.<sup>6</sup> This is an innovative approach to the study of metalware, that brings together the literature about metalware that has focused on specific materials such as silver and pewter. In particular, this thesis looks at everyday items, such as candlesticks and dishes, and the small consumer goods or toys that became popular by the eighteenth century,

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<sup>4</sup> Maxine Berg, “Product Innovation in Core Consumer Industries in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” in *Technological Revolutions in Europe*, ed. Maxine Berg and Kristine Bruland (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1998), 139; and Cissie Fairchild, “The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods in Eighteenth Century Paris,” in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1994), 236.

<sup>5</sup> Francesca Carnevali, “Golden Opportunities: Jewelry Making in Birmingham between Mass Production and Speciality,” *Enterprise and Society* 4/2 (2003): 272-298.

<sup>6</sup> For want of time and space, this thesis has had to neglect some of the more specialist areas of the metalware trade, notably the gun trade and jewellery trade, which certainly warrant further study.



including buckles, buttons and watch-chains. The emergence of new products and materials, which were often cheaper imitations of luxury goods such as silver and gold, meant that there was an increase in demand for metalware because it was accessible to a wider strata of the population.<sup>7</sup>

The expansion of the metalware trade in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was part of a wider context of pre-industrial expansion that resulted in innovation across the textile, ceramics, and metalware trades.<sup>8</sup> New technologies meant that manufacturing could be undertaken on a larger scale across these different trades. This gave rise to influential manufacturers, such as Josiah Wedgwood in the ceramics trade and Matthew Boulton in the metalware trade, who were instrumental in the development of new products and designs. The success of the ceramics and glass trades challenged the metalware trade, as objects such as plates, drinking vessels, sauce boats and coffee pots that were once made in metalware began to be produced in increasingly fashionable ceramic and glass designs.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, as this thesis shows, metalware remained extremely desirable. Luxury goods in silver and gold maintained their social status and intrinsic value, and new materials appealed to the increasing consumer demand for fashionability and novelty.

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<sup>7</sup> Helen Clifford, "Innovation or Emulation? Silverware and its Imitations in Britain 1750-1800," *History of Technology* 23 (2001): 59-80.

<sup>8</sup> Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain. Volume 1: Industrialisation, 1700-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Patrick O'Brien and Roland Quinault, eds., *The Industrial Revolution and British Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and David Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Clifford, "Innovation or Emulation?" 59.

The materiality of metalware had unique physical, economic and social implications. These material factors give an insight into the sustained importance of metalware in the crowded market for consumer goods, and emphasise the importance of understanding the impact of the materiality of metalware on the expansion of the trade. Firstly, metalware was unique because it could not be produced in its pure state or it would be too soft to work with; therefore, each type of metalware was a combination of different materials, which was difficult to determine just by viewing an object. Secondly, the relationship between metalware and money, and the way in which silver could be melted down into ready money, meant that silver had a continual intrinsic value. It also meant that the state was uniquely involved in the regulation of the trade, as they needed to ensure that all silver adhered to the legal standard.

As a result of its materiality, there were four distinct stages of the production process of metalware: the extraction of the metal ore; the refining of the metal; the preparation of the metal during production, whether by rolling, battering, or casting; and the fashioning and finishing of the metal goods. At each stage, metalware passed between different producers, manufacturers or merchants, who often had competing interests. This thesis focuses upon the final two stages of production, and the production and fashioning of metal goods. Even within these processes, there were numerous specialist roles including engravers, stampers, assayers and cleaners.<sup>10</sup> As Maxine Berg has shown, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was an increase in specialisation within the metalware trade and innovation in production processes and the organisation of production, which influenced wider

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<sup>10</sup> Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 168-172; and Giorgio Riello, "Strategies and Boundaries: Subcontracting and the London Trades in the Long Eighteenth Century," *Enterprise and Society* 9/2 (2008): 243-280.

debates about quality.<sup>11</sup> However, because each individual type of metalware was affected by its different material composition, it is crucial to understand the whole life-cycle and the different origins of each type of metalware: for example, whilst copper could be mined in its raw form, brass was an alloy of zinc and copper.

The physical properties, methods of production, and value of each type of metalware also influenced the regulation of the trade. This thesis therefore considers each type of metal according to its individual characteristics and the general category of metalware as a general label for the sector. The regulation of silver was unique because of the above-mentioned relationship between silver and money, and so it is only in the silver trade that silver was assayed and applied with a hallmark to certify its quality. However, similar regulations were used by the guild and state authorities across multiple types of metalware. Other quality marks, such as the letter ‘X’ or ‘X and crown’ were applied to different types of products and materials including needles and pewter to signal the best quality goods.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, within the silver, silver-plate and pewter trades, the guilds who regulated the trades required the registration of sponsors’ marks, which were added to every object as a way to identify the producer of an object.<sup>13</sup> Other types of metalware, such as brass, also adopted this practice,

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<sup>11</sup> Maxine Berg, “From Imitation to Invention: Creating Commodities in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *Economic History Review* 55/1 (2002), 4; Berg, *The Age of Manufactures*, 262; and Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 157.

<sup>12</sup> Peal, *Pewter of Great Britain*, 64. See also chapter 1 of this thesis, and Figure 1.2.

<sup>13</sup> Sponsors’ marks represented the name of the producer or firm. Depending on the type of metalware and the regulation of that trade, this might be their initials or whole name. However, despite the individual mark, there was often a wide range of workers and subcontractors who contributed to the production of an object, and not always the named producer. Ellenor Alcorn, *Beyond the Maker’s Mark: Paul de Lamerie Silver in the Cahn Collection* (Cambridge: John Adamson, 2007), 22; and Helen Clifford, *Silver in London: The Parker and Wakelin Partnership 1760-1776* (London: Yale University Press, 2004).

although because there was no guild regulation, these marks did not appear on all products. It is therefore useful to study a range of metalware alongside each other to see the methods of controlling quality, both within the regulation of the trade by the guilds and state, and in customary practice by individual producers. As this thesis shows, on the whole, the regulation of metalware centred around the control of people, products and processes.

### **i.1.2 The Shifting Places of Production**

Until the second half of the seventeenth century, London had been the undisputed centre of production of metalware in England. London producers were influential in the regulation of the trade because they controlled the guild system. By the eighteenth century, as the trade expanded, regional clusters of producers began to emerge in Birmingham and Sheffield. Unlike London, which was the metropolitan hub of a large number of trades, Birmingham and Sheffield were overwhelmingly specialised in the metalware trades.<sup>14</sup> Their producers developed flexible skills that could be used across different types of metalware, including silver, brass, tin and pewter. More importantly, they led the way with developing new materials including Sheffield plate, and new technologies such as die stamping. In part, this was facilitated by their use of a flexible organisation of production, where manufacturers subcontracted specialised tasks when they were required, which allowed them to reduce the cost of labour and respond quickly to new fashions. This flexible organisation of production and recruitment of

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<sup>14</sup> David Barnett, *London, Hub of the Industrial Revolution: A Revisionary History 1775-1825* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1998).

short-term workers encouraged the movement of people, products and processes between these three areas.

By covering a time span from the end of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century, this thesis engages with the broad changes that occurred across the period, notably the expansion of the trade in the regional manufacturing towns; the emergence of new products, materials and technologies including Sheffield plate and die stamping; and improved transportation and means of communication between regulators, producers, retailers and consumers. The literature has often separated research into London and the regional manufacturing towns of Birmingham and Sheffield.<sup>15</sup> However, as this thesis shows, each region should not be seen in isolation.<sup>16</sup> This builds upon geographic and spatial approaches to history that considers the shifting economies, identities, and designs of eighteenth-century towns and cities.<sup>17</sup> The expansion of Birmingham and Sheffield, and their production of new products and materials, impacted the trade in London and nationally. Moreover, much of the regulation of the trade by the guilds and state remained centred in London, and

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<sup>15</sup> Notable research on Birmingham includes Eric Hopkins, *Birmingham: The First Manufacturing Town in the World 1760-1840* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989); Berg, "Commerce and Creativity," 173-204; and Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*. Research into the trade in London includes David Mitchell, "Innovation and the Transfer of Skill in the Goldsmith's Trade in Restoration London," in *Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Bankers: Innovation and the Transfer of Skill, 1550 to 1750* (Stroud: Sutton, 1995), 5-22.

<sup>16</sup> In particular, this thesis focuses upon the metalware trade in Birmingham because of the rich body of surviving sources associated with Matthew Boulton and the petition for the Birmingham Assay Office. However, this thesis also looks in depth at the trades in Sheffield and London, and the relationship between these three regions.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); and Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680-1780* (London: Guilford Press, 1998).

so the regional trade continued to be influenced by regulators and producers in London.

### **i.1.3 Main Actors**

There were a number of manufacturers who were influential in the development of the metalware trades, especially in Birmingham and Sheffield. For instance, Matthew Boulton, one of the most celebrated eighteenth-century manufacturers and inventors, was at the forefront of the Birmingham trade.<sup>18</sup> He developed his Soho Manufactory from 1766, which produced a range of cheap toys, new-luxuries in Sheffield plate, and luxury items in silver and ormolu. He developed contacts with influential members of the social elite, who he used to market his products and promote his commercial interests in Parliament.<sup>19</sup> Other prominent manufacturers in Birmingham and Sheffield included John Taylor, the Birmingham toy and button maker, Samuel Garbett, the Birmingham manufacturer and refiner, and Thomas Boulsover, a cutler in Sheffield and the inventor of Sheffield plate.<sup>20</sup> This thesis builds upon the biographical studies

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<sup>18</sup> Matthew Boulton (1728-1809) inherited his father's toy manufactory in 1759 and increased its scale of production and range of products. In particular, he was known for his partnership with John Fothergill which was established in 1762. Shena Mason, ed., *Matthew Boulton: Selling what all the World Desires* (London: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Boulton also pursued his philosophical and scientific interests and was a member of the Lunar Society as well as a fellow of the Royal Society from 1785. Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men: The Friends Who Made the Future, 1730-1810* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> John Taylor (1711-75) was an important local producer and employed 500 workers in his button and toy manufactory in Birmingham in the mid-eighteenth century. He specialised in gilt plating, japanning and painting, and was thought to have a weekly output of buttons to the value of £800. Samuel Garbett (1717-1803) was hugely influential in the petition for the new Assay Offices in Birmingham and Sheffield in 1773. He also worked as a merchant and

of producers undertaken by some historians such as Kenneth Quickenden, in contrast to economic histories of metalware that often fail to meaningfully engage with the people involved in the regulation and production of metalware.<sup>21</sup> It is necessary to have an awareness of the key actors of the period - including influential individuals, but also groups of people and institutions - to understand the competing agents and influencing factors in the deliberation of quality.

The guilds and the state were also key players in the metalware trades. These institutions were responsible for the regulation of the trade, and so often enforced particular standards of quality. As will be outlined in chapter 1, there were a number of different guilds who regulated either particular materials, such as the Worshipful Company of Pewterers and the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, or those which regulated particular products, such as the Worshipful Company of Needlemakers. On the whole, they ensured that all producers had the necessary training through the apprenticeship system, that products had a standard material composition, and that producers worked honestly to a good standard of workmanship.<sup>22</sup> However, the guilds

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chaired the Birmingham Commercial Committee that represented the interests of local manufacturers. Thomas Boulsover (1705-88), a Sheffield cutler, discovered Sheffield plate in the mid-eighteenth century, and turned his attention to the production of plated buttons and buckles. See their individual profiles in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com).

<sup>21</sup> There are many useful biographical studies and databases of producers, especially in the silver trade. For example, 'Appendix V: Boulton and Fothergill's Silversmiths,' in Kenneth Quickenden, "Boulton and Fothergill Silver," Unpublished PhD Thesis, Westfield College, 1990, 307-333. See also, the '1682 Mark Plate Database' compiled by David Mitchell that can be accessed at the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths Library.

<sup>22</sup> It therefore contributes to recent research that sees the regulation of the trade in a more positive light than previous decades, and emphasises the important role of institutions such as the guilds and state. For example, William J. Ashworth, *Customs and Excise: Trade, Production, and Consumption in England, 1640-1845* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

required state support to give them the authority to enforce their regulations. At times, groups of producers could petition the state to influence the regulation of the trade. Therefore, the institutions of the guild and state were also closely connected to the interests and influence of individual producers.

The wider public were also influential in the deliberation of quality. This thesis engages with this important group throughout. The wider public included consumers, but also the social elite who often determined what was fashionable and respectable; tourists who travelled across the country and Europe to visit prominent manufactories; and the vast array of servants, cleaners and thieves who used, cleaned and stole metalware in the vibrant consumer culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At times, different parts of this group had more agency and influence, but together they contributed to the popular perception of metalware and determined what was popular, desirable and fashionable.

## **i.2 Literature Review**

This thesis bridges the gap between economic discussions of quality, the history of production and technology, and studies of retailing and consumerism. In doing so, it focuses upon three main areas of the literature: firstly, it contributes to the literature on quality as a convention; secondly, it is influenced by the ‘material-turn’ and the development of material culture and object-based studies; and finally, it builds upon the expanding understanding of product life-cycle.

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2003), 6-7; Bert De Munck, “Guilds, Product Quality and Intrinsic Value: Towards a History of Conventions?” *Historical Social Research* 36/4 (2011): 103-124; and Maarten Prak, Catharina Lis, Jan Lucassen, and Hugo Soly, eds., *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries: Work, Power, and Representation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).



### i.2.1 Quality

The concept of quality has captured the attention of historians across disciplines. Economic historians have shown quality to be a ‘convention’.<sup>23</sup> A convention was a commonly understood belief or behaviour that was determined by a particular institution or society.<sup>24</sup> This meant that the quality of an object was not inherent or constant, but was debated and deliberated at different points in time and in particular cultural contexts. This thesis engages with the work of Bert De Munck and Philippe Minard, which begins to explore what they describe as the ‘deliberation of quality’.<sup>25</sup> De Munck argues that conventions of quality were embedded in the political institutions of the guild and state. He suggests that intrinsic value, in particular, was a ‘pure convention’ because the most valuable materials were not the rarest and so the hierarchy of quality and value had to be enforced.<sup>26</sup> One way in which the guilds could do this was through their use of hallmarks, which guaranteed quality through the political status of the guild.<sup>27</sup> Minard places a greater emphasis upon the consumer deliberation of quality, rather than that of the guilds and state. He suggests that there

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<sup>23</sup> De Munck, “Guilds, Product Quality and Intrinsic Value,” 103-124; and Christian Bessy, “Institutions and Conventions of Quality,” *Historical Social Research* 37/4 (2012), 19.

<sup>24</sup> H. Peyton Young, “The Economics of Convention,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 10/2 (1996): 105-122.

<sup>25</sup> De Munck, “Guilds, Product Quality and Intrinsic Value,” 103-124; and Philippe Minard, “Micro-Economics and Social Construction of the Market: Disputes Among the London Leather Trades in the Eighteenth-Century,” *Historical Social Research* 36/4 (2011), 150-168.

<sup>26</sup> De Munck, “Guilds, Product Quality and Intrinsic Value,” 110; and Bert De Munck, “The Agency of Branding and the Location of Value: Hallmarks and Monograms in Early Modern Tableware Industries,” *Business History* 54/7 (2012), 1057.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

was a shift in the eighteenth century from ‘regulated quality’ (enforced by the guilds and state) to ‘deliberated quality’ (determined by the public).<sup>28</sup> However, neither pay enough attention to how and why the deliberation of quality occurred. Moreover, they neglect the objects themselves.

The history of production and technology has provided a more detailed understanding of how the quality of objects changed in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By bringing together an analysis of production and technology in specific historical and regulatory contexts, historians such as Liliane Hilaire-Pérez have investigated why periods of innovation occurred.<sup>29</sup> Hilaire-Pérez suggests that the state was able to encourage innovation in France because it treated invention as a ‘public good’, in contrast to England where it was seen as an ‘individual responsibility’.<sup>30</sup> Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford have considered specifically the metalware trades in Birmingham and Sheffield.<sup>31</sup> Their analysis of new products and materials - especially imitative metals such as pinchbeck and ormolu - has provided insights into how innovations in technologies influenced the hierarchy of metalware and the perception of quality. Barbara Bettoni has similarly looked at the development of technology and its impact on the perception of quality in the button trade in Italy.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Minard, “Micro-Economics and Social Construction of the Market,” 150.

<sup>29</sup> Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, “Technology as a Public Culture in the Eighteenth Century: The Artisans’ Legacy,” *History of Science* 45/2 (2007): 135-153; and Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, “Technical Invention and Institutional Credit in France and Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century,” *History and Technology* 16/3 (2000): 285-306.

<sup>30</sup> Hilaire-Pérez, “Technical Invention and Institutional Credit,” 287-288.

<sup>31</sup> Helen Clifford, “Concepts of Invention, Identity and Imitation in the London and Provincial Metal-Working Trades, 1750-1800,” *Journal of Design History* 12/3 (1999): 241-255; and Berg, “Commerce and Creativity,” 173-204.

<sup>32</sup> Barbara Bettoni, “Usefulness, Ornamental Function and Novelty: Debates on Quality in Button and Buckle Manufacturing in Northern Italy (Eighteenth to Nineteenth Centuries),”

Bettoni suggests that new technologies sparked a greater emphasis upon novelty, which she argues superseded intrinsic quality in the eighteenth century.

### **i.2.2 Material Culture**

Artefacts have been conspicuously absent from the economic discussions of quality. Although much of the research has engaged with the materiality of different objects and materials, for instance by considering the intrinsic quality of metalware, they have rarely looked closely at the objects themselves.<sup>33</sup> The material-turn of the past decades has shown us the advantages that can be gained by undertaking case-studies of individual objects.<sup>34</sup> Not least, the way in which objects can give a unique insight into social identities, religious practices, and domestic habits that were everyday practices and so were not recorded.<sup>35</sup> Historians of material culture are well aware of the

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in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture, 1500-1900*, ed. Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 171-207; and Barbara Bettoni, "Fashion, Tradition, and Innovation in Button Manufacturing in Early Modern Italy," *Technology and Culture* 55/3 (2014): 675-710.

<sup>33</sup> With the exception of Jennifer Basford's thesis, which looks at the branding of ceramics, and unlike the majority of other branding literature analyses individual objects from the York Archaeological Trust and National Clay Pipe Archive. Jennifer Basford, "A Commodity of Good Names: The Branding of Products, c. 1650-1900," Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of York, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001); Carolyn L. White, ed., *The Materiality of Individuality: Archaeological Studies of Individual Lives* (London: Springer, 2009); and Peta Motture and Michelle O'Malley, eds., *Re-thinking Renaissance Objects: Design, Function and Meaning* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson, "Introduction," in *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and Its Meanings*, ed. Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 1-26.

limitations of an object-centred approach, including the fact that surviving objects are exceptional, and the way in which it is difficult to find objects with directly-connecting documentary evidence.<sup>36</sup> However, recent work has emphasised the variety of material culture approaches that are open to historians, from undertaking a case study and object biography of a particular object or analysing collections of objects, to looking at broken or absent objects and the ways in which objects are described in contemporary documents.<sup>37</sup>

The influence of archaeological literature has encouraged historians to look more closely at what the object itself can communicate, through its design and the marks on its surface.<sup>38</sup> For example, it can give a sense of shifting attitudes towards personal possessions across time and place, as seen by Mary C. Beaudry's study of maker's marks and owner's marks on bodkins found in England and America.<sup>39</sup> However, metalware has been somewhat neglected in the past decades by historians of material culture, who have largely focused on clothing and ceramics.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, "Introduction: Writing Material Culture History," in *Writing Material Culture History*, ed. Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 8.

<sup>37</sup> Karen Harvey, ed., *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources* (London: Routledge, 2009); Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, eds., *Writing Material Culture History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); and Catherine Richardson, Tara Hamling and David Gaimster, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Material Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> Carolyn L. White, "Introduction: Objects, Scale and Identity Entangled," in *The Materiality of Individuality: Archaeological Studies of Individual Lives* ed. Carolyn L. White (London: Springer, 2009), 3-13.

<sup>39</sup> Mary C. Beaudry, "Bodkin Biographies," in *The Materiality of Individuality*, 95.

<sup>40</sup> For example, the edited collection of essays in *Everyday Objects* contains a majority of contributions about clothing, ceramics and paintings. Tara Hamling and Catherine

Nevertheless, the study of metalware has remained popular amongst antiques collectors, for whom metalware has maintained a high value.<sup>41</sup> Their passion for collecting has translated into a series of in-depth studies of the history of metalware, whose mission has been focused upon identifying individual objects using broader changes in production and design rather than understanding metalware in its wider social, cultural and economic context. There have also been a number of dedicated historians and art historians who have focused on the metalware trades.<sup>42</sup> For instance, literature that centres around the study of inventories has looked at the possession of metalware.<sup>43</sup> Like the economic literature, much of the historical research has failed to engage with the objects themselves. However, Helen Clifford, has shown the benefits of combining a historical understanding of silver with a close analysis of individual objects especially in her analysis of the symbolism and social significance of patina.<sup>44</sup>

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Richardson, eds., *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and Its Meanings* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> Collectors have written about the full-range of metalware, including silver, Sheffield plate, pewter and brass. For example, Peal, *Pewter of Great Britain*; Gordon Crosskey, *Old Sheffield Plate: A History of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Plated Trade* (Oxford: Treffry Publishing, 2011); and Judith Banister, *English Silver* (London: Cassell, 1987).

<sup>42</sup> Philippa Glanville, *Silver* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996); Eric Delieb, *The Great Silver Manufactory: Matthew Boulton and the Birmingham Silversmiths 1760-1790* (London: Studio Vista, 1971); and Henry Hamilton, *The English Brass and Copper Industries to 1800* (London: Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 1967).

<sup>43</sup> Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760* (London: Routledge, 1988), especially Table 2.1 and Table 8.4; and Mark Overton, Jane Whittle, Darron Dean and Andrew Hann, *Production and Consumption in English Households, 1600-1750* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>44</sup> Helen Clifford, "The Veneer of Age: Valuing the Patina of Silver in Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture, 1500-1900*, ed. Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 239-255.

### i.2.3 Product Life-Cycle

Research into consumer goods such as metalware has provided an understanding of the different aspects of an object's life-cycle, including its regulation, production, retail and consumption. Often literature into these different areas remain separate, which has allowed for a more in-depth analysis of how they shifted for different products in different geographic contexts.<sup>45</sup> However, the understanding of the life-cycle of objects has especially benefited from the literature that considers the life-cycle as a whole.<sup>46</sup> Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff suggest that objects, like people, have social lives, and their meaning and value changes through their exchange and commodification.<sup>47</sup> By historicising this theory, Karin Dannehl has outlined a wider object biography and life-cycle, from manufacturing to maintenance, recycling or disposal.<sup>48</sup> There has been an increasing awareness of the vibrant afterlife of objects,

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<sup>45</sup> This introduction has already discussed literature associated with regulation and production. Notable literature on retailing and consumption includes Bruno Blondé, Peter Stabel, Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme, eds., *Buyers and Sellers: Retail Circuits and Practices in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols: 2006); Bruno Blondé, Natacha Coquery, Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme, eds., *Fashioning Old and New: Changing Consumer Patterns in Western Europe, 1650-1900* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009); Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, eds., *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe 1650-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); and John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>46</sup> Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>47</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things*, 3; and Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in *The Social Life of Things*, 64.

<sup>48</sup> Karin Dannehl, "Object Biographies: From Production to Consumption," in *History and Material Culture*, 123-138.

which has resulted in the development of research into the successful second-hand trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a topic that has been explored by Beverly Lemire, Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme, among the many.<sup>49</sup> This has shown that objects were frequently repaired and recycled, and that they exchanged hands between producers and owners, cleaners and servants. This emphasises the potential limitations of focusing on one point in an object's life-cycle, whether the manufacturing process or the inventory of objects at the death of a consumer.

As well as looking at the movement of objects, the literature has also explored the movement of knowledge between different stages of the product life-cycle. This connects to a wider literature on the transfer of knowledge by historians such as Joel Mokyr, Maxine Berg, Liliane Hilaire-Pérez and Catherine Verna, which often focuses on the circulation of technical knowledge between producers.<sup>50</sup> Economic theory has looked beyond production, and has highlighted the problems that can arise from information asymmetry and the uneven distribution of knowledge between regulator, producer, retailer and consumer. In particular, it emphasises the role that brands, and the marks on objects, play in resolving problems of asymmetry and communicating

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<sup>49</sup> Beverly Lemire, "Peddling Fashion: Salesmen, Pawnbrokers, Tailors, Thieves and the Second-hand Clothes Trade in England, c. 1700-1800," *Textile History* 22/1 (1991): 67-82; and Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme, eds., *Modernity and the Second-hand Trade* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> Joel Mokyr, *The Gifts of Athena: Historical Origins of the Knowledge Economy* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002); Maxine Berg, "The Genesis of 'Useful Knowledge'," *History of Science* 45/2 (2007): 123-133; Clifford, "Concepts of Invention, Identity and Imitation," 241-255; and Liliane Hilaire-Pérez and Catherine Verna, "Dissemination of Technical Knowledge in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era: New Approaches and Methodological Issues," *Technology and Culture* 47/3 (2006): 536-565.

product quality to a consumer.<sup>51</sup> Recent literature has looked more closely at the communication between producer and consumer. For instance, Kate Smith's research into the ceramic industries shows that the eighteenth century saw an increasing consumer interest in manufacturing, workmanship and the skill of the producer.<sup>52</sup>

### **i.3 The Making and Possessing of Quality**

This thesis argues that the making and possessing of quality was intertwined. Firstly, it turns to contemporary debates about quality and shows that quality was debated and re-defined in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, among regulators, producers, retailers and consumers, in response to the expansion of the trade. Secondly, it emphasises that the circulation of people, products and processes influenced the contemporary understanding of quality, especially because of the emergence of Birmingham and Sheffield as prominent manufacturing towns. Finally, it argues that these changes increased the importance of the consumer knowledge of metalware, and enhanced the consumer interest in regulation, innovation and production.

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<sup>51</sup> George A. Akerlof, "The Market for 'Lemons': Quality Uncertainty and the Market Mechanism," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 84/3 (1970): 489; and Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna, "Locating and Dislocating Value: A Pragmatic Approach to Early Modern and Nineteenth-Century Economic Practices," in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture*, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Kate Smith, "The Potter's Skill: Perceptions of Workmanship in the English Ceramic Industries, 1760-1800," Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, May 2010, 13-17; and Kate Smith, *Material Goods, Moving Hands: Perceiving Production in England, 1700-1830* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).



### i.3.1 Quality and Metalware

Quality, in *A New Dictionary of Trade and Commerce* published in 1766, was defined as ‘the good or ill condition of a mercantile commodity, as of its perfection or imperfection: thus, this corn, this wine, is not of a good quality; or, on the contrary, it is excellent’.<sup>53</sup> What made a consumer good perfect or imperfect was debated and shifted in different historical contexts. There was an expansive language associated with the quality of consumer goods. Good quality items were described in terms of their quality but also their excellence, goodness and nobleness.<sup>54</sup> This language was used to discuss metalware that was of a high quality, for instance, metalware that was of a superior workmanship or fashionable design. It was also used to describe metalware that was of the regulated standard - that was not substandard or deceptive.

The metalware trade in England in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries provides a unique opportunity to investigate the changing perception of quality. By considering a range of metalware, from luxuries and new luxuries, to everyday goods and second-hand items, it shows the impact of new goods and materials on the perception of quality in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As this thesis argues, metalware could be perceived to be of good quality because of its material properties, for instance its intrinsic value or workmanship, immaterial properties, including its design and innovation, and a subjective understanding of

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<sup>53</sup> Richard Rolt, *A New Dictionary of Trade and Commerce, Compiled from the Information of the Most Eminent Merchants, and from the Works of the Best Writers*, Vol. II (London, 1766), 926.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Kwass, “Ordering the World of Goods: Consumer Revolution and the Classification of Objects in Eighteenth Century France,” *Representations* 82/1 (2003): 87-116.

quality, such as its aesthetic value, fashionability and the reputation of the maker. This builds upon the aforementioned literature that analyses the convention of quality and looks at how quality was defined in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>55</sup> This thesis challenges the binary nature of the shift from a regulated quality to a deliberated quality. It demonstrates that, within the metalware trade, the regulated intrinsic quality of metalware remained important. The range of new goods and materials developed by producers led to an increasing emphasis upon variety, novelty and innovation, but the intrinsic quality of metalware remained crucial in the understanding of quality.

### **i.3.2 People, Products and Processes**

This thesis brings together the histories of the metalware trade in London, Birmingham and Sheffield, which are discussed separately in the literature about the period. By doing so, it emphasises the importance of the movement of people, products and ideas between these places. This sheds new light on the shifting understanding of quality, the role of reputation, and the circulation of knowledge. This thesis argues that the emergence of new products, materials and innovative technologies, developed primarily in Birmingham and Sheffield, influenced the trade as a whole. This builds upon research that looks at the dissemination of innovations in production and technologies by Clifford, Berg and Hilaire-Pérez, to show that the movement of products and producers increased the importance of novelty and innovation in the perception of quality.

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<sup>55</sup> De Munck, “Guilds, Product Quality and Intrinsic Value,” 103-124; and Minard, “Micro-Economics and Social Construction of the Market,” 150.

Quality was defined by the tangible qualities of objects, such as its material composition and workmanship, but also by intangible qualities including the reputation of people, products and processes. This included the reputation of individual producers and retailers, fashionable and innovative designs and materials, and trustworthy processes such as the assaying of gold and silver. Reputation became increasingly important in the eighteenth-century metalware trade because the emergence of new objects, innovations and expanding manufacturing towns such as Birmingham and Sheffield, challenged the traditional view of quality and increased the importance of product variety and fashionability. As the trade expanded, there was increased competition between individual producers and groups of producers in different towns; therefore, producers and retailers sought to differentiate themselves in the increasingly crowded market and develop a good reputation. With the production of quality metalware, the use of marketing and advertising and the support of influential members of the social elite, producers could influence their popularity and public perception. There were new ways in which producers could benefit from a good reputation in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including the use of trade cards, bill-heads and carefully designed shop spaces.

### **i.3.3 Consumer Knowledge**

Consumers were increasingly involved in the inspection and deliberation of quality. This was for three reasons. Firstly, it was the result of a shift in the regulation of the trade. As the metalware trade expanded in the late-seventeenth century, the guilds and state found it increasingly difficult to monitor and guarantee the quality of metalware. Acting as flexible institutions, they relied more heavily upon the consumer to report

substandard ware. Literature on the guilds has argued that this reflected the diminishing of guild authority. However, I suggest instead that the guilds and state maintained their influence by communicating with the public to enforce their perception of quality.

Secondly, this shift in the regulation of the trade encouraged the increasing circulation of knowledge between regulator, producer and consumer. Information about the regulation, production and retail of metalware travelled by word-of-mouth, in print, and through the marks on objects. New publications, such as William Badcock's *A Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares*, were produced as a guide to the regulation of metalware, which included information about the assay process and the regulatory marks on gold and silver. Moreover, newspapers published notices to consumers to make them aware of fraudulent practices and changes in the regulation of the trade. Therefore, this thesis argues that there was a greater consumer knowledge of regulation and the marks on metalware than has previously been acknowledged by the literature. Producer-retailers used the knowledge of the regulation of the trade to their advantage and claimed to be a greater guarantee of quality than retailers and middle-men, because their marks were on their products and so they would be held accountable for poor-quality production.

Finally, the change in the regulation of the trade coincided with an increasing consumer interest in production.<sup>56</sup> Consumers were excited by innovative technologies and new designs and materials. They had an increasing desire for variety and novelty, which encouraged producers to continue to innovate and expand their product range. Some producers capitalised on this interest in production and opened the doors of their manufactories to visitors, who flocked to see the expanding workshops and machinery.

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<sup>56</sup> Smith, "The Potter's Skill," 13-17.

As such, consumers developed new knowledge about production, and understood the importance of innovation in production and technologies. This impacted on the perception of quality within the metalware trade, which allowed producers to encourage and benefit from the increasing consumer interest in production.

#### **i.4 Sources and Methodology**

In order to understand the perception of quality in the metalware trades in England, this thesis covers a broad period from 1675, and the post-restoration re-configuration of the guild system and regulation of metalware, to the Eden Treaty in 1785 when producers encouraged re-opening trade with France and the wider expansion of international trade. However, there is a particular focus upon a period in the mid-eighteenth century, from 1740 to 1775. At this time, there was significant change within the metalware trade as innovations in production and technology emerged, and Birmingham and Sheffield expanded and petitioned for new Assay Offices and more regulatory control. This thesis uses a wide range of sources that give an insight into the changing perception of quality throughout this time, including documentary evidence, visual sources, and surviving objects.

##### **i.4.1 Documentary Evidence**

In order to understand the complex interaction between regulator and producer, retailer and consumer, this thesis uses a diverse range of documentary evidence. Not least, it analyses advertisements in newspapers, parliamentary records, cases of theft in the Old Bailey, poems and plays. There are numerous documents associated with the

guilds in London, which illuminate the regulation of people, products and materials, and the enforced standards of product quality. They also include records of the complaints and punishments of their members and so give an insight into the production of the metalware, and the relationship of producers with the regulation of the trade. A range of production records have also survived and provide more information about the production, retail and consumption of metalware. There are a number of inventories of producers' workshops which show the tools used in the trade and give an impression of the scale of work undertaken, as well as more comprehensive records of producers' account books and letters to and from consumers. In particular, this thesis looks at the records of Matthew Boulton, whose expansive collection of production records at the Birmingham City Archives contains diaries, letters, and account books. These records therefore make it possible to see the connections and the circulation of knowledge between producers, regulators, retailers and consumers.

One especially rich group of sources are the documents associated with the opening of new Assay Offices in Birmingham and Sheffield in 1773. A number of regional manufacturers, including Matthew Boulton and Samuel Garbett, petitioned for the opening of the Assay Offices, whilst the London goldsmiths protested against their opening. Alongside the final petitions are the parliamentary committee's interviews with producers in London and the regional manufacturing towns, which directly question, and provide anecdotal evidence, about the state of the trade and methods of production. This also gives an insight into the process of petitioning, as multiple drafts of the petitions were circulated amongst producers, who added their annotations and opinions. More importantly, these records document debates about

quality in the metalware trade, and illuminate the importance of reputation and the skill of the producer.

An important source for this thesis is William Badcock's 1677 publication *A Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares* and his revised edition *A New Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares*, published in 1708.<sup>57</sup> Badcock, a London goldsmith, published the book as a consumer guide to the regulation of the trade, and so it included an overview of guild and state regulation, the assay process and the regulatory marks on gold and silver. This text is analysed alongside a wider range of publications associated with the production and regulation of the trade, not least *The Book of Trades or Library of Useful Arts*, and James Bisset's *Poetic Survey Round Birmingham. Accompanied by A Magnificent Directory*, which provide details about the manufacturing and retailing of consumer goods, including metalware.<sup>58</sup>

#### **i.4.2 Visual Sources**

This thesis also engages with a variety of visual sources. By looking at visual evidence, it is possible to get an insight into the contemporary perception of metalware.<sup>59</sup> This

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<sup>57</sup> William Badcock, *A Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares* (London: Printed for John Bellinger and Thomas Bassett, 1677); and William Badcock, *A New Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares* (London: Printed and Sold by W. Freeman, 1708).

<sup>58</sup> *The Book of Trades or Library of Useful Arts*, Part III, Third Edition (London: Tabart and Co., 1805/6); and James Bisset, *Bisset's Poetic Survey Round Birmingham. Accompanied by A Magnificent Directory* (Birmingham: Swinney and Hawkins, 1800).

<sup>59</sup> Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Use of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001); and Ludmilla Jordanova, *The Look of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

fills gaps in the surviving documentary evidence, and provides a better understanding of the unwritten, everyday knowledge of objects. Metalware was regularly depicted in paintings and print for example in Pieter van Roestraten's oil painting, *Still Life with Silver Tankard*, which prominently displays the regulatory hallmark on the silver tankard.<sup>60</sup> Depictions of metalware were also included in a range of print sources, including publications such as Bisset's *Magnificent Directory*, which contained images of different metalware manufactories and retailers across Birmingham. Moreover, images of metalware featured on other printed ephemera such as pattern books, trade cards, bill-heads and handbills.

Many of these sources are analysed on an individual basis alongside documentary evidence. However, this thesis also incorporates a more detailed qualitative and quantitative study of a sample of trade cards. Trade cards were printed cards that communicated information about a retailer's location and the products that they sold. They were often highly decorative and contained visual representations of the objects that were for sale, the shop front and the tools and technologies of the trade. By looking in more depth at the visual conventions that reoccurred on trade cards and bill-heads, such as the depiction of metal goods and representations of producers at work, it is possible to see how metalware was advertised and quality was conveyed and perceived.

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<sup>60</sup> Pieter van Roestraten, *Still Life with Silver Tankard*, Oil Painting, England, c. 1700, Victoria and Albert Museum.



### **i.4.3 Artefacts**

This thesis also studies individual objects. As previously discussed, the study of individual objects has been conspicuously absent from much of the literature around quality. However, an understanding of the materiality of metalware and an analysis of its design shows the impact of new materials and technologies. It is important to remember that surviving objects are exceptions, that often represent the luxury end of the market, rather than the everyday items that were used, damaged and destroyed.<sup>61</sup> Metalware is unusual in its durability and so many examples have survived, in contrast to ceramics and textiles. This means that it is possible to undertake a close-analysis of individual objects, for example a sugar basin (Figure i.1). In particular, this thesis pays close attention to the marks on metalware, including the marks of quality on objects (notably the hallmark on silver, or X and Crown on pewter), sponsors' marks (often the initials or name of the producer or firm) and geographic marks (noting the place of production), which were often regulated by the guilds and state but also emerged outside the regulation of the trade, whether as a customary or fraudulent practice. The marks on the sugar basin (Figure i.1) show that it was made using sterling silver (by the lion passant mark) by the firm Boulton and Fothergill (whose sponsor's mark was MB IF) and was assayed in Birmingham in 1776 (conveyed by the anchor mark of the Birmingham Assay Office and the date letter 'D'). It is also possible to see the impact of new materials, technologies and fashions when analysing objects.

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<sup>61</sup> Karen Harvey, "Introduction: Practical Matters," in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (London: Routledge, 2009), 14.



**Figure i.1: Sugar Basin, Sterling Silver and Glass, Boulton and Fothergill, 1776, Birmingham Assay Office, S0338.**

Again, metalware is a unique and important case study because the marks on objects have often survived, in contrast to the regulatory marks on textiles that are lost in the selvedge. Guides to collecting metalware, and museum catalogues such as the Victoria and Albert Museum Collections Database, document in detail the marks on objects, and are increasingly aware of their use in the identification of objects, as well as their historical interest.<sup>62</sup> However, more work needs to be done on understanding their contemporary significance. This thesis argues that the marks on objects, particularly on metalware, can be used for more than just the identification of an

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<sup>62</sup> See for example, Frederick Bradbury, *Bradbury's Book of Hallmarks* (Sheffield: Sheffield Assay Office, [1927] 2014); and *Victoria and Albert Museum Collections Database*, [www.collections.vam.ac.uk](http://www.collections.vam.ac.uk).

object's producer, place of production, or owner. By looking at the marks on objects, in conjunction with other documentary and visual evidence, it is possible to see their role in the communication between regulator, producer, retailer and consumer. This thesis therefore uses the study of objects to enhance our understanding of the historical evolution of the concept of quality, and bridge the gap between economic history and the history of technology, production and consumption.

## **i.5 Chapter Outline**

This thesis draws upon a range of sources to investigate the making and possessing of quality metalware in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It uses a structure that reflects the life-cycle of an object, from its regulation and production, through to its retailing and consumption. It begins with regulation of the trade to outline the regulated quality of metalware, as enforced by the guilds and state. It is only with an awareness of the enforced standard of quality that it is possible to understand the impact of the expansion of the trade, and the emergence of new products and materials; moreover, changes in the production, retailing and consumption of metalware, which in turn affected the regulation of the trade. This thesis makes it clear from the beginning that the stages of the life-cycle were not linear and were intertwined in their deliberation of quality.

Chapters 1 and 2 focus upon the regulation of the metalware trade. Chapter 1 explores the anatomy of the regulation of the different types of metalware in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the guilds and state. It outlines three main aspects of regulation - the regulation of people, products and processes - which attempted to control the quality of metalware. Although there were often similar

attitudes to quality control across the regulation of different trades, such as the textile and leather trades, this chapter emphasises that the materiality of metalware had unique implications for its regulation. In particular, the intrinsic properties of metalware were a concern of regulators and consumers because the material composition of metalware was so difficult to determine just by looking at an object, and the relationship between metalware and money meant that silver had to be of the legal standard. Therefore, the regulation of metalware had unique processes to guarantee quality, including the assaying of gold and silver and the use of marks of quality. Overall, it argues that regulation was generally effective, but was increasingly fragmented from the late-seventeenth century to prevent fraud and corruption.

Chapter 2 continues the discussion of the regulation of the metalware trade to investigate how formal and informal institutions worked together to control quality. It shows that it was increasingly difficult to undertake searches in the expanding places of production, especially as the legal right to search private property was called into question. However, instead of being an absolute decline in their authority, the guilds were flexible institutions that allowed them to adapt by placing a greater burden of quality control on the consumer, and working with the public to better enforce their standards of quality. This led to the increasing communication between the institutions regulating the trade and the public, for example in newspapers and published guides to the regulation of the trade such as Badcock's *A Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares*.<sup>63</sup>

Chapters 3 and 4 look more closely at the expansion of the trade in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the emergence of new products, producers

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<sup>63</sup> Badcock, *A Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares*; and Badcock, *A New Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares*.

and places of production. Chapter 3 investigates the expansion of the trade and the introduction of new products and materials in the market for metalware. It shows that there was increasing competition between London and expanding regional manufacturing towns in Birmingham and Sheffield. Innovation, especially in the regional manufacturing towns, created a new taxonomy of goods and affected the hierarchy of quality metalware, in which variety and innovation in production and technology became increasingly important. It explores three key reasons for the expansion of Birmingham and Sheffield: the role of influential manufacturers, the way in which these regions became known for the adaptable skills of their producers, and the development of new technologies that allowed metalware to be produced at a higher quality and a lower cost.

Chapter 4 emphasises the need to bring together the histories of Birmingham, Sheffield and London, which should not be seen in isolation because of the movement of people, products and ideas. It was not just the development of new products and technologies, but also an increasingly flexible organisation of production and informal networks of producers and subcontractors that allowed for greater innovation and product variety. Manufacturers used extensive subcontracting networks so they that could access a wider range of skills whenever they were in demand. Moreover, pattern books and samples of metalware were circulated between producers, retailers and consumers to emphasise the expanding variety of designs, products and materials. This enhanced the importance of novelty and fashionability in the perception of quality. However, the ease with which products and designs could travel, and the importance of novelty, meant that it was crucial that producers protect the originality of their designs and ensure the quality of their products.

Chapter 5 is the intersection between a focus upon producers and regulators, and the retailing and consumption of the trade. It argues that reputation is central to the deliberation of quality. Not only was reputation crucial in the regulation of the trade, in the working relationships between producers, but also in their relationship with the wider public. This chapter analyses the debate surrounding the petitions for, and subsequent opening of, new Assay Offices in Birmingham and Sheffield in 1773 to show how product quality was intertwined with the reputation of people, products and processes. Reputation could help to regulate the trade by holding producers accountable for substandard production, but could also be used to manipulate the regulation of the trade, as occurred in the petitions for and against the new Assay Offices. Formal and informal methods of marking goods with individual and collective marks (marks of quality, sponsor's marks and geographic marks) made reputation increasingly important, as the 'branding' of goods was used to involve the public in the adjudication of quality.

Chapters 6 and 7 analyse how metalware was distributed to the consumer, in terms of its marketing and advertising and also its retailing. Chapter 6 explores the communication between producer, retailer and consumer through the marketing and advertising of metalware using trade cards, newspaper advertisements, personal relationships and the objects themselves. It undertakes a qualitative and quantitative study of a sample of trade cards, and the visual and linguistic conventions that reoccurred. It shows the ways in which quality was conveyed explicitly and implicitly, with a particular emphasis on product variety and production. This was especially important with the marketing of new products and materials, which were positioned alongside traditional materials and second-hand goods. Therefore, the marketing and

advertising of metalware increased the association of variety and innovation with production in everyday practice, in print and in the public imagination.

Chapter 7 explores the different ways in which consumers acquired metalware. Retailing spaces were flexible and adapted to provide consumers with exciting new ways to inspect and assess the quality of potential purchases, whether in a shop, on the street or at an auction. Not only did this allow the consumer to better judge quality when the burden was increasingly on them, but it allowed retailers to respond more flexibly to new fashions. The historiography of retailing emphasises the role of the retailer as a middle-man and a broker of quality. However, the producer-retailer claimed to be a better guarantee of quality and educated the public to look for their marks and trust in producers as providers of quality metalware.

Finally, Chapter 8 looks more closely at the deliberation of quality from the perspective of the consumer. It highlights the dissemination of information between regulators, producers, retailers and consumers. It argues that the curiosity and desire for knowledge often came from the consumer, who possessed an increasing scientific and intellectual curiosity that was enhanced by their ability to tour manufactories, the dissemination of poetry about production, and the exchange of recipes to clean and repair worn metalware. This chapter further explores the new qualities that objects obtained through their consumption and use, such as the social value of objects and intimate knowledge people had of their possessions. Therefore, a knowledge of the tangible and intangible qualities of metalware was equally important in the perception of quality of late-seventeenth- and eighteenth-century metalware.

## Chapter 1.

### The Guild and State Regulation of Metalware

Institutions, particularly the guilds and state, aimed to control the quality of metal goods across the metalware trades through the regulation of people, products and processes. This included the regulation of the material composition of metal objects; the maintenance of acceptable standards of workmanship; restrictions upon who could produce particular goods and the training that they were required to undergo; and the processes by which objects were tested and marked. In the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries these regularly adapted and were increasingly segmented to prevent fraud and corruption.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter explores the aims of guild and state regulation, and their ability to enforce standards of quality within the metalware trades in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Firstly, this chapter provides an analysis of the guilds and their authority, and the ways in which guild and state interests were often intertwined. This builds upon the recently revived interest in regulation, which has highlighted the importance of political institutions and considers their action upon production and

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<sup>1</sup> Recent historiography has emphasised the guilds' decline. See, for example, John Forbes, "Search, Immigration and the Goldsmiths' Company: A Study in the Decline of its Powers," in *Guilds, Society and Economy in London 1450-1800*, ed. Ian Anders Gadd and Patrick Wallis (London: Centre for Metropolitan History, 2002), 97; and Michael Berlin, "'Broken All in Pieces': Artisans and the Regulation of Workmanship in Early Modern London," in *The Artisan and the European Town, 1500-1900*, ed. Geoffrey Crossick (Aldershot: Scholar, 1997), 78. However, this chapter and chapter 2 show that the flexibility of the guilds allowed them to adapt and maintain their influence in the regulation of the metalware trades.



trade in a more positive light.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, it was the guilds' role as political institutions, that allowed them to influence conventions of quality. The second part of this chapter engages more closely with the three main areas of regulation: the guild and state's control of products, people, and processes. The story of the metalware trades was part of wider attitudes towards quality control across different trades, including the textile and leather trades.<sup>3</sup> However, many regulations, and their successes and failures, were unique to the metalware trade because of the materiality of metal goods and the relationship between metal and money. In particular, the regulation of metalware was unique in that it centred around the use of marks of quality, such as hallmarks and sponsors' marks, that guaranteed the intrinsic value of silver and allowed the producer of substandard metalware to be identified. An investigation into the regulation of the metalware trade allows us to better understand how quality was defined, imposed and enforced.

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<sup>2</sup> William J. Ashworth, *Customs and Excise: Trade, Production, and Consumption in England, 1640-1845* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6-7; Bert De Munck, "Guilds, Product Quality and Intrinsic Value: Towards a History of Conventions?" *Historical Social Research* 36/4 (2011): 103-124; and Maarten Prak, Catharina Lis, Jan Lucassen, and Hugo Soly, eds., *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries: Work, Power, and Representation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Philippe Minard, "Micro-Economics of Quality and Social Construction of the Market: Disputes Among the London Leather Trades in the Eighteenth-Century," *Historical Social Research* 36/4 (2011): 150-168; Giorgio Riello, "Nature, Production and Regulation in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France: The Case of the Leather Industry," *Historical Research* 81/211 (2008): 75-99; and John Styles, "Spinners and the Law: Regulating Yarn Standards in the English Worsted Industries, 1550-1800," *Textile History* 44/2 (2013): 145-170.

## 1.1 The Guilds and their Authority

There were a number of different guilds that regulated the metalware trades in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>4</sup> Some governed the production of specific materials, such as the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths and the Worshipful Company of Pewterers. Other guilds focused their attention upon specific products, such as the Worshipful Company of Cutlers and the Needlemakers' Company. Although each guild had its individual priorities and concerns, there were similar regulations restricting who could become a member and what commercial rights they had, not least through the training of producers, the testing of products and the marking of goods as a guarantee of quality.<sup>5</sup> In particular, it was the establishment and maintenance of their political authority that acted - in the words of William Ashworth - as an 'institutional certifier of quality'.<sup>6</sup>

The guilds were social and political institutions that provided mutual protection and benefits for networks of producers. Individual guilds saw themselves as 'a Body Politique and Corporate', a 'fraternity' which had 'many privileges'.<sup>7</sup> They developed collective and co-operative identities through the negotiation of their

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<sup>4</sup> The guilds associated with metalware include The Worshipful Company of Armourers and Brasiers; Blacksmiths; Clockmakers; Cutlers; Founders; Gold & Silver Wyre Drawers; Goldsmiths; Gunmakers; Ironmongers; Needlemakers; Pewterers; and Tin Plate Workers.

<sup>5</sup> Sheilagh Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade: Merchant Guilds, 1000-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 41.

<sup>6</sup> William J. Ashworth, "Quality and the Roots of Manufacturing 'Expertise' in Eighteenth Century Britain," *Osiris* 25/1 (2010), 244.

<sup>7</sup> John Hewitt, *The Universal Pocket Companion: Being a More Useful, Instructive, Comprehensive, and Complete Book, Than of the Like Kind, Ever Yet Published* (London, 1741), 43; and Guildhall Library, MS 07138/1, Worshipful Company of Tin Platers, 'Miscellaneous Salvaged Papers', 1671.

different functions as regulators, charities, and hosts for feasts and banquets.<sup>8</sup> In return, they demanded that members must adhere to their regulations. Membership was not optional, and in order for producers to work with particular metals or products, they were legally required to be a member and pay ‘the Quarteridge’ or membership fee.<sup>9</sup> The precise cost varied across each guild, but for example was 2s 6d yearly for freeman and journeymen pewterers in 1702, for all producers within the City of London and its suburbs.<sup>10</sup> The guilds were not allowed to profit from their members, but used the money they received from their membership fees, and in the case of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths the additional fee to assay silver or gold, to contribute to the running of the guild. In exchange, the guilds provided a degree of security, petitioned for common interests, and supported producers needing charity, as well as their families after their death. Individual guilds emphasised the collective identity of their producers, not least through the symbolic imagery in their heraldry, which drew upon commonly produced objects and tools that were used in the trade.<sup>11</sup> The guilds also engaged with producers on a regular basis. Their officers were comprised of producers from that trade, and so were already part of the wider network of producers. The regular courts of the guilds also integrated the guilds in the lives of their members, which heard the grievances of members, mediated arguments between producers, and punished fraudulent behaviour. These methods produced the political

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<sup>8</sup> Antony Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European and Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (London: Methuen & Co, 1984), 3.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the regional authority of the guilds, see chapter 2 in this thesis.

<sup>10</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07116, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Transcripts of Charter and Bye-Laws’, 1702, f. 82.

<sup>11</sup> The heraldry of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers contained a pewter dish, and the heraldry of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths contained buckles and a covered cup, as well as a set of scales and a touchstone.

identity and authority of the guilds, but framed their role as a collective institution that was designed for the benefit of the trade.

Individual guilds did not secure their authority on their own, but they relied upon the state and the monarch to grant charters and continually support their regulations. As will be shown throughout the course of this chapter, state support was crucial, and at times the guilds' officers sacrificed personal advantages so that they could gain state support to more effectively regulate the quality of metalware. Charters were granted when a guild was first established, and were renewed and revised when a new monarch took the throne. In particular, charters adapted to incorporate the widening spaces of production, and began to increase guild control to 'all manners of shopps cellers warehouses storehouses and other rooms and places whatsoever'.<sup>12</sup> With each renewal also came a new oath for the guild members to take, which included a loyal address to the monarch.<sup>13</sup> It was important for the guilds to do this so that they could enforce the authority of the guilds and encourage the state to give statutory support with acts and statutes for 'the encouragement and better regulation' of the metalware trades.<sup>14</sup> When the guilds required extra support, the monarch could also issue a proclamation to enforce a statute. For example, a proclamation in the seventeenth century publicised debates in the pewter trade and the law regarding the

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<sup>12</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07138/1, Worshipful Company of Tin Platers, 'Miscellaneous Salvaged Papers', 1671.

<sup>13</sup> Members described themselves as 'yo[u]r ma[jes]ties most loyall and dutifull subjects', and vowed 'to the uttermost of o[u]r power and ability serve your Ma[jes]tie'. Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, H.I.I., 'Address of the Wardens and Assistants of the Co of Goldsmiths to the King James II', 1687.

<sup>14</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 22218, 'List of Subscribers Towards the Cost of a Parliamentary Bill for the Introduction of an Additional Duty', 1755.

monopolisation of tin.<sup>15</sup> However, proclamations only enforced what was already in law. The regulatory connections between the guilds and state allowed for the transfer of authority across the two, so that a fraud upon the guild was also a fraud upon the monarch, the state, and the nation. Therefore, although guilds could not enforce quality alone, they worked together with the state to establish their political authority.

Not only did charters grant the guilds the authority to act as a body politique, but they allowed the guilds to self-regulate and impose a series of by-laws and ordinances for the ‘searching, assaying, supervising, marking and regulating’ of metalware.<sup>16</sup> This contributed to the cycle of control, whereby the guilds maintained regular contact with, and control over, their members, who in turn depended upon the guilds. The demand for membership was not just a way to keep control of the trade but it was a crucial way for the guilds to survive as institutions, raise funds and maintain their finances. Historians have therefore debated whether the guilds should be seen as monopolies, which has been intertwined with debates about whether the guilds were effective or inefficient, and whether they encouraged or stifled innovation.<sup>17</sup> Whilst it is important to note that the guilds relied on their authority and the income of their membership for their survival, they could only work within the parameters of what the state allowed and what gained the support of the networks of producers who managed them. In particular, there were careful restrictions on the

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<sup>15</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 2215, ‘The Case Concerning the Pewter Trade in England as to the Monopolizing Tinn’, 16--.

<sup>16</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/1, ‘Extracts from Acts of Parliament for Preventing Frauds in Gold and Silver Wares’, 1739, f. 6. (Stat. 12. Geo. II. Cap. 26)

<sup>17</sup> Those arguing that there was a monopoly within the guilds include Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade*, 41-45. Those arguing against the guilds’ monopoly include S.R. Epstein and Maarten Prak, eds., *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

guilds' ability to profit. Whilst they could raise money to cover administrative costs, 'the overplus money (if any) shall be... applied... in prosecuting offenders' or future prices and rewards 'shall be lessened in proportion by the respective companies'.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, although they could manipulate the trade to suit their interests, the guilds could not directly profit from their members. Instead, the guilds and state used their political authority to enforce particular standards of quality. As will be shown throughout the course of this chapter, the guilds used their authority to control the products, people and processes within the metalware trade.

## **1.2 Aims and Motivations**

Among the main aims of the guilds were quality control and fraud prevention. These were sought in order to maintain standards of quality across the national metalware trades. Each of the different guilds emphasised that their purpose was to ensure that the metalware under their jurisdiction was 'well & artificially made' and 'wrought of good stuff and materials'.<sup>19</sup> However, what constituted 'good stuff', or sub-standard metalware was not always specified. Bert De Munck argues that these definitions were 'conventions' and did not require explicit definition because they were embedded in the political institution and the apprenticeship process.<sup>20</sup> This was especially the case

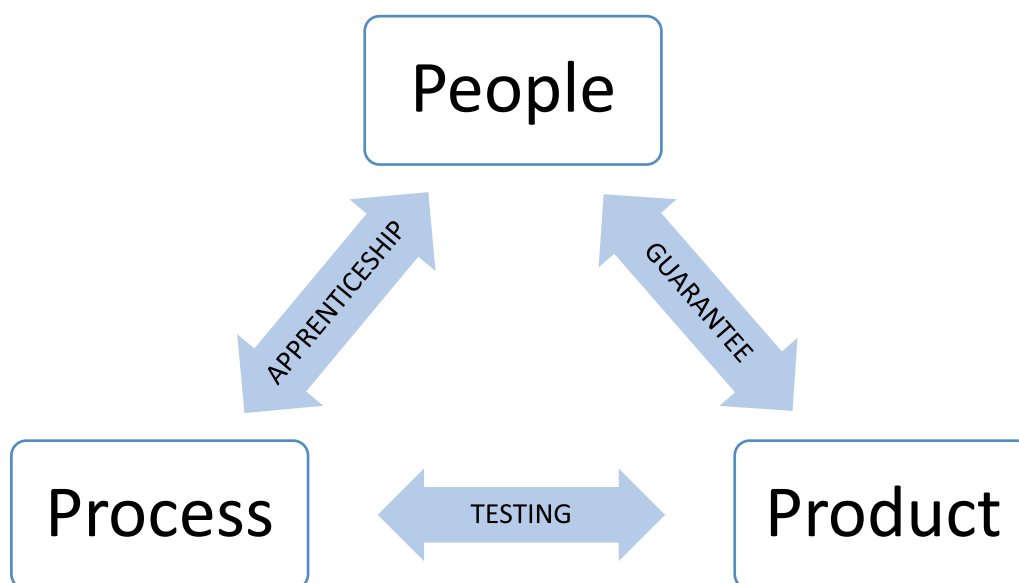
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<sup>18</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/24, 'An Act for Appointing Wardens and Assay-Masters for Assaying Wrought Plate in the Towns of Sheffield and Birmingham', f. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 02820, Worshipful Company of Needlemakers, 'Extracts from Ordinances 1688-1875', f. 10.

<sup>20</sup> De Munck, "Guilds, Product Quality and Intrinsic Value?" 103-124; and Bert De Munck, "The Agency of Branding and the Location of Value: Hallmarks and Monograms in Early Modern Tableware Industries," *Business History*, 54/7 (2012), 1063.

with ‘intrinsic value’, which he argues was inextricably connected to the political standing of the guilds.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the ‘economy of quality’ had to be established through confidence and trust in particular political or social institutions.<sup>22</sup> At different times, and in different contexts, these definitions were articulated and negotiated, and steered towards the control of products, people or processes (Figure 1.1).



**Figure 1.1: Chart Depicting the Aims and Mechanisms of Guild Control in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century England.**

These three areas - the people, products and processes - were interlinked (Figure 1.1). The guilds and state used their control of these areas to establish their authority and regulate the trade. In particular, they used the apprenticeship process to provide the people in the trade with the skills and expertise with which they could be a producer of good-quality products; this meant that the regulatory processes were managed by

<sup>21</sup> Bert De Munck, “Artisans, Products and Gifts: Rethinking the History of Material Culture in Early Modern Europe,” *Past & Present* 224 (2014), 43.

<sup>22</sup> Philippe Minard, “Facing Uncertainty: Markets, Norms and Conventions in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Regulating the British Economy, 1660-1850*, ed. Perry Gauci (London: Ashgate, 2011), 188.

skilled producers through the testing of product quality; therefore, the mark on the products acted as a guarantee of product quality because the producers were associated with the guilds and could be trusted.

### 1.3 Products

The primary purpose of the metalware guilds was to control the material composition of metal goods. This was a particular concern within the metalware trade because metal was never worked into an object in its pure form, as it would have been too soft. Instead, metals had to be mixed in order for them to be viable, practical products.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, metalware was unique in that it sought a standard quality rather than an absolute quality: too high and it would have little use-value, too low and it would have little intrinsic value.<sup>24</sup> It was difficult to visibly judge the proportions of these different components and therefore the intrinsic quality of metal goods. This caused an information asymmetry between producer and consumer because it was difficult for the consumer to visually assess the quality of metalware.<sup>25</sup> The material composition

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<sup>23</sup> Silver was produced by refining copper, gold, lead and zinc; pewter was typically 85-99% tin mixed with copper, antimony, bismuth or lead.

<sup>24</sup> This is in contrast to the textile trade, where the regulation of the trade was centred around the concept of ‘absolute quality’. Giorgio Riello, “Governing Innovation: The Political Economy of Textiles in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Fashioning the Early Modern: Fashion and Innovation in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800*, ed. Evelyn Welch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 53.

<sup>25</sup> George A. Akerlof, “The Market for ‘Lemons’: Quality Uncertainty and the Market Mechanism,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 84/3 (1970): 488-500; and Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna, “Locating and Dislocating Value: A Pragmatic Approach to Early Modern and Nineteenth-Century Economic Practices,” in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture, 1500-1900*, ed. Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 4.



of metal goods was also uncertain because of the ease with which they could be recycled and melted down to create new products. Different qualities, or types, of metal might be mixed together, which would reduce the overall quality of metal. This was a concern of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, who feared that negligent or deceitful producers were making ‘sev[er]all private remeltings of Tynn thereby mixing good and badd together’.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, it was crucial for institutions such as the guilds to protect consumers against hidden defects. If this did not happen, the quality of the product might fall because there would be no way to detect substandard products and so there would be no incentive to produce good-quality metalware, and the market for metalware could be put at risk.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the guilds and state used their political authority to develop trust in their institutions by guaranteeing a standard material composition of particular metal goods, and thus reassure the public of the quality of metalware.

The material composition of metalware was especially important within the silver trade because of the relationship between metal and money. Silver goods could be melted down and turned into ready money, which happened regularly at times of hardship or war. Therefore, the guilds were under pressure from the state to maintain the standard of silver goods, so that any silver that was melted down into coinage would adhere to the official standard. Throughout most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the standard of silver was 92.5 percent, or 11 ounces 2 penny-weight per pound troy. This increased between 1697 and 1720 to 95.8 percent, or 11oz

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However, as shown later in this thesis (especially chapters 7 and 8), there were some ways in which consumers could assess and inspect the quality of metalware.

<sup>26</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 22214, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Copy of Grievances Concerning Abuses in the Casting & Assaying’, 1674-9, f. 2.

<sup>27</sup> De Munck, “The Agency of Branding,” 1057.

10pw, known as the Britannia standard, which was introduced in order to prevent coinage being melted down and turned into plate.<sup>28</sup> These standards were enforced through their testing at an Assay Office. Instead of being solely enforced by the by-laws of the guilds, the assay process was supported with legislation imposed by the state to ensure that ‘none work worse silver than money’.<sup>29</sup> Regulations enforced by the state affirmed that only the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths was authorised ‘with assaying and marking all the new standard plate of the kingdom’.<sup>30</sup> As will be shown later in the chapter, silver was applied with a hallmark, which included the guild’s assay mark, and the sterling or Britannia mark (the lion passant or the lion’s head erased), which was known as the ‘king’s mark’.<sup>31</sup> The control of materials was therefore important ‘for the good and safety of the public... both for the honour and riches of the realm’.<sup>32</sup> This emphasised the need for the guild and state to work together to enforce a legal standard for metalware, especially silver.

Product quality was a concern of different guilds and trades, in England and across Europe. They used the inspection, testing and marking of goods to provide a degree of quality control and to develop trust in their regulatory processes. As shown by Philippe Minard, skins within the leather trade could be stamped to reflect their quality, either with a ‘D’ for damaged or ‘S’ for sound.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, textiles in Munster

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<sup>28</sup> Judith Banister, *English Silver* (London: Cassell, 1987), 25.

<sup>29</sup> Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, G.II.4.2., ‘Counsels Opinion as Two Cases Involving Fraudulent Attempts to Obtain the Co Marks on Counterfeit Articles’, 1767-9. (Stat. 28. Ed. I. Cap. 20)

<sup>30</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/1, ‘Extracts from Acts of Parliament for Preventing Frauds in Gold and Silver Wares’, f. 5. (Stat. 8. Will. III. Cap. 8)

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 6. (Stat. 12. Geo. II. Cap. 26)

<sup>33</sup> Minard, “Micro-economics and Social Construction of the Market,” 160.

were stamped upon inspection by the city council at ‘the legge’, and applied with a city mark, as shown by Christof Jeggle.<sup>34</sup> Although product quality and the intrinsic properties of materials was a concern to all trades, it was a particular concern within the metalware trades because of the materiality of metalware. There were some differences between the guild regulation of different products or materials. In some cases, the intervention of the guilds aimed to enforce a standardised legal quality of metalware, as in the case of the aforementioned hallmarking and enforcement of the legal standard of silver. Therefore, this aimed to prevent fraudulent behaviour. The hallmark acted as a guarantee of a specific standard, and represented the authority of the guilds and their ability to test the intrinsic properties of a particular silver object.

The guilds could also use their authority to indicate when a product was of a high quality. Often it was only the best quality goods that were marked. For example, in the pewter trade, only the best quality pewter could be marked with quality marks such as the X and crown, as seen on a pewter sauce boat made by Henry Joseph in London in 1780 (Figure 1.2).

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<sup>34</sup> Christof Jeggle, “Labelling with Numbers? Weavers, Merchants and the Valuation of Linen in Seventeenth Century Munster,” in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture, 1500-1900*, ed. Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 37.



**Figure 1.2: Sauce Boat, Pewter, Henry Joseph, London, c. 1780, Victoria and Albert Museum, M.101-1945.**

The regulations of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers in 1690 ordered that ‘no member of the mistery shall strike any other mark upon his ware than his Touch or Mark struck upon Plate at the Hall and the Rose and Crown Stamp and also the letter X upon extraordinary ware’.<sup>35</sup> In the case of the pewterers, a sponsor’s mark could also include the word London or the Rose and Crown, although producers had to get permission from the guild to use these devices, and periodically their use was

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<sup>35</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Index to the Orders of Court 1691-1740’, 11 August 1698, f. 55.

restricted.<sup>36</sup> At times, only the best quality pewter could be marked with a sponsor's mark, when in 1691 the Worshipful Company of Pewterers emphasised that 'no member [is] to strike his name upon hard mettall or ordinary ware'.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, within the Needlemakers' Company, only the best quality needles could be marked with the letter X. Their ordinances, first issued in 1688, 'ordered that from henceforth all best needles of what sort soever (except the 11<sup>th</sup> size) shall be marked that the buyer may know them from ordinary needles'.<sup>38</sup>

On the one hand, the enforcement of a standardised material composition of metalware intended to create a perceived intrinsic value associated with trust in a political institution. If the state, enacted through the guilds, were able to guarantee the intrinsic quality of metalware, then it would reduce any uncertainty on the part of the consumer. Economic historians have also argued that it was important to be able to identify quality in order to benefit from higher prices.<sup>39</sup> This appears to have been a concern in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when some producers felt disadvantaged by their production of higher quality items when other producers were producing substandard metalware at lower prices. As described by Matthew Boulton, the famous Birmingham manufacturer, in 1773:

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<sup>36</sup> Geographic marks are discussed further in chapter 5.

<sup>37</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Index to the Orders of Court 1691-1740', 17 December 1691, f. 54.

<sup>38</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 02820, Worshipful Company of Needlemakers, 'Extracts from Ordinances 1688-1875', f. 28

<sup>39</sup> Akerlof, "The Market for 'Lemons'," 499; and Mark Casson and Nigel Wadeson, "Export Performance and Reputation," in *Trademarks, Brands, and Competitiveness*, ed. Teresa da Silva Lopes and Paul Dugiod (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 31.

I suppose silver of 10oz fine would at a price in proportion please as well in buckles as 11oz 2dw and it would be allowing us a proper means of defending ourselves against foreigners who manufacture silver below our standard in such case we might be allowed to stamp the initial letters of the makers name and an X and an anchor - indeed we ought to get distinct information of the standards used in all manufacturing towns in Europe.<sup>40</sup>

Producers wanted to ensure that, if they did go to the effort and expense of producing a good-quality item, then the public were able to recognise it as such. More importantly, they wanted to be able to distinguish between different qualities in order for consumers to be able to make informed decisions about the price and the quality of the metalware that they wished to purchase.

The identification of product quality was also concerned with establishing quality through the durability, use-value and workmanship of products. Across the metalware trades there were restrictions about which products could be made with particular materials. For example, the Worshipful Company of Needlemakers aimed to prevent ‘any needles made of iron or other bad stuff and unworkmanlike wrought’.<sup>41</sup> In part, this was down to the practical use of a product, and the way in which needles made of iron would be less durable. This was also a way to control product quality, as the guilds ordered that certain goods had to be made with a particular quality of metal. Within the pewter trade, there were restrictions about what could be made with

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<sup>40</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/42, ‘Letter Samuel Garbett to Matthew Boulton’, 25 May 1773, f. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 02820, Worshipful Company of Needlemakers, ‘Extracts from Ordinances 1688-1875’, f. 25.

‘ordinary’ and ‘new fashioned’ pewter, such as watch cases and signs, which ‘none ought to be made but of Fine pewter’.<sup>42</sup> Fine pewter was superior because it had a greater quantity of tin, with less hardening agent such as copper, bismuth or antimony; in contrast, lay pewter was a lower quality because it had less tin and more lead, usually three or four parts tin to one part lead, however the exact specifications varied slightly.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, a number of different guilds, including the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, Worshipful Company of Needlemakers and Worshipful Company of Pewterers, aimed to standardise products, and guarantee varying, but clearly defined, levels of quality.

Different parts of metal objects were also standardised, with specific requirements for their workmanship, size and weight. Producers were fined on a regular basis for not adhering to these specific criteria. For example, Mr John Fasson, was fined £5 in 1769 because his quart pot weighed ‘only one pound eight ounces and half and being very bad workmanship and also unsound’.<sup>44</sup> A series of statutes were also enforced in 1752 to support these regulations and ensure that hollow wares made in pewter were not marked in the same way as solid pewter, which was to be checked for in the country searches.<sup>45</sup> This attempted to prevent the fraudulent practice of selling hollow metalware as solid pewter. It therefore attempted to control the material composition and workmanship of metal goods, and create an increasing

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<sup>42</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07090/9, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Orders of Court 1711-1740’, 24 July 1718.

<sup>43</sup> John Hatcher and T.C. Barker, *A History of British Pewter* (London: Longman, 1974), 1.

<sup>44</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07104/26, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Rough Court Minutes 1768-1771’, 19 October 1769.

<sup>45</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 22198/1, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Papers Relating to Country Searches, 1660-1839’.

standardisation within the metalware trades in which different qualities were clearly defined.

## 1.4 People

The control of product quality within the metalware guilds was intertwined with the control of people and processes. The guilds hoped to better guarantee quality and standardise the material composition of metalware by regulating the producers who manufactured those products. The most effective way with which they could do this was by requiring members to register a mark with them and to apply that mark to their products. This was used to regulate who was able to produce goods within that particular trade, and the apprenticeship and training that they had to undergo before they could become a master. The register of marks in the silver and pewter trades was also used to identify producers of substandard metalware, and so was used to disincentivise and punish fraudulent behaviour.<sup>46</sup>

All producers working with particular metals were required to become members of their respective guild. One of the first charters for the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths in 1300, stated that ‘no Goldsmith of England, or none elsewhere within the King’s dominion, shall make or cause to be made, any vessel,

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<sup>46</sup> Producer’s marks appeared on a range of other metalware, including brass and iron, but this was not a widespread or regulated practice. Similarly, producers often applied pottery with their marks within the ceramics trade, but this was also not regulated and there was no contemporary register of marks. There have been subsequent guides to these marks published for the benefit of collectors, for example William Chaffers, *The Collector’s Handbook or Marks and Monograms on Pottery & Porcelain of the Renaissance and Modern Periods* (London: Reeves and Turner, [1874] 1901).



jewel, or other thing of gold or silver, unless it be of good and true allay, or better'.<sup>47</sup>

After June 1758, the state also demanded that producers had to obtain a license, which replaced the annual duty that they had to pay, but also required producers to register their marks at an Assay Office and adhere to guild regulations.<sup>48</sup> Instead of a fee per weight of metalware (that was imposed through the duty), a licence was granted on the annual payment of 40s by every person trading in gold or silver plate.<sup>49</sup> This increased to a payment of £5, for anyone trading in gold plate of two ounces or upwards, or silver 30 ounces or upwards.<sup>50</sup> This also allowed the guilds and state to extend their authority to expanding regional manufacturing towns, such as Birmingham, who by 1774 had more than forty manufacturers in the region who had taken out licences, in some cases to make silver and silver plated goods and in others to be allowed to sell it.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, the relationship between the guilds and state continued, as they worked together to regulate the metalware trade.

Upon becoming a member of a guild, producers within the silver and pewter trades had to register a mark. The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths demanded that every producer should 'come from every good town to London to be ascertained of their touch'.<sup>52</sup> This mark varied depending on the material and the object, and the guilds often regulated what mark producers were able to have. For example, from 1738

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<sup>47</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/1, 'Extracts from Acts of Parliament for Preventing Frauds in Gold and Silver Wares', f. 1. (Stat. 28. Edw. I. Cap. 20)

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, f. 7. (Stat. 31. Geo. II. Cap. 32)

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/12, 'Copy Report on Sheffield and Birmingham Assay Office Petitions', f. 10.

<sup>52</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/1, 'Extracts from Acts of Parliament for Preventing Frauds in Gold and Silver Wares', f. 1.

producers under the jurisdiction of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths were required to register a mark that was ‘the first letters of his [or her] Christian and surname’.<sup>53</sup> Prior to this date, producers had been required to register the first two letters of their surname.<sup>54</sup> Pewterers were also required to register their mark with the Worshipful Company of Pewterers. They entered their touches in the Company’s mark book and also applied their mark to a touchplate (Figure 1.3), which were kept at Pewterers’ Hall in London.



**Figure 1.3: Touchplate of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, from Charles Welch, *History of The Worshipful Company of Pewterers of the City of London*, Volume II (London: Blades, East & Blades, 1902), Appendix.**

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<sup>53</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/24, ‘An Act for Appointing Wardens and Assay-Masters for Assaying Wrought Plate in the Towns of Sheffield and Birmingham’, 1773, f. 3.

<sup>54</sup> Marcia Pointon, “Jewellery in Eighteenth-Century England,” in *Consumers and Luxury*, ed. Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 123.

As seen by the range of marks on display on the touchplate, unlike goldsmiths' marks, pewterers' marks could contain a symbol or image, as well as their whole name. At the point of entering their mark, producers had to pay a fee, which for pewterers was 6s 8d for entering a mark.<sup>55</sup> This allowed the guilds to maintain their authority over producers across the trade.

Difficulties with the control of producers arose because of the overlapping nature of the metalware trades and the guilds that regulated it. Producers only needed to be a member of one guild but often worked with different materials, or produced different objects, and therefore had the potential to come under the jurisdiction of multiple guilds. It was advised by the guilds that this should relate to the trade which they worked within the most, but in practice producers were often registered in trades outside their area of production. Nevertheless, producers had to adhere to the regulations enforced by the respective guild who regulated the trade if they were working with a particular material.<sup>56</sup> Some ordinances could only be enforced across its members, for example the regulation enforced by the Worshipful Company of Pewterers that 'no member... strike any other mark than his own touch and the rose and crown'.<sup>57</sup> Other guilds had specific regional jurisdiction, for example the Cutlers' Company of Hallamshire, which registered marks from 1614 and received statutory backing from 1623 to regulate the cutlers' trade in Sheffield.<sup>58</sup> However, many

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<sup>55</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07116, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Transcripts of Charter and Bye-Laws', 1702, ff. 72-73.

<sup>56</sup> William Badcock, *A New Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares* (London: Printed and Sold by W. Freeman, 1708), 20.

<sup>57</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Index to the Orders of Court 1691-1740', 11 August 1698, f. 55.

<sup>58</sup> David Higgins and Geoffrey Tweedale, "Asset or Liability? Trade Marks in the Sheffield Cutlery and Tool Trades," *Business History* 37/3 (1995), 2; and Lionel Bently, "The Making

regulations enforced by the guilds were directed at ‘every man’ or ‘every person’ who produced goods within a particular trade.<sup>59</sup> A number of different guilds, including the Worshipful Companies of Goldsmiths, Pewterers and Needlemakers, had the authority to inspect the quality of their goods, whether or not they were a member of that guild. Consequently, some producers registered their marks with multiple guilds at once, or multiple times within a guild. Producers who made goods in silver as well as silver plate, were required to register separate marks with the Assay Office to apply to each type of product from 1784.<sup>60</sup> The marks had to be significantly different, and unlike the mark for silver, the mark for plated silver could contain a different combination of letters and symbols.<sup>61</sup> It is likely that this was to avoid confusion between solid silver and plated silver goods. Matthew Boulton, for example, registered his mark ‘Boulton’ and ‘The Sun’ on 28 April 1788 (Figure 1.4). As seen by the register of marks (Figure 1.4), other producers used different symbols including a unicorn head, a horse shoe, an open hand and a balance. The guilds were therefore able to keep a record of producers within their trade and their marks. The historiography of the guilds recognises the difficulty in regulating newer industries inside and outside the metalware trades, for example within the iron and ceramics trades.<sup>62</sup> However, in some

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of Modern Trade Mark Law: The Construction of the Legal Concept of Trade Mark (1860-1880),” in *Trade Marks and Brands: An Interdisciplinary Critique*, ed. Lionel Bently, Jennifer Davis and Jane C. Ginsburg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5, 16.

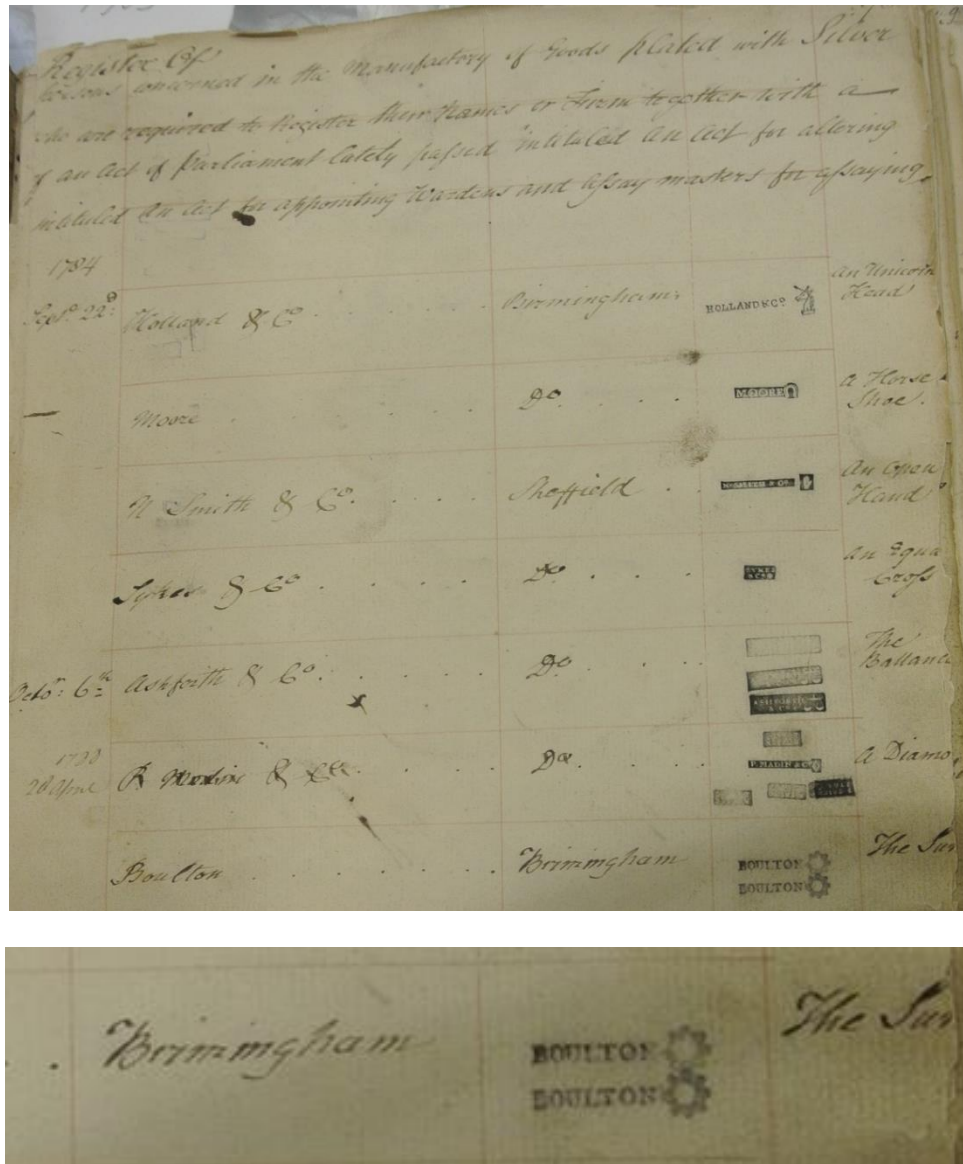
<sup>59</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07090/9, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Orders of Court 1711-1740’, 21 March 1722.

<sup>60</sup> Molly Pearce, Marilyn Duerden and John Bartlett, *Sheffield Silver 1773-1973* (Sheffield: Sheffield City Museum, 1973), 17-18.

<sup>61</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/24, “Appendix”, in ‘An Act for Appointing Wardens and Assay-Masters for Assaying Wrought Plate in the Towns of Sheffield and Birmingham’, f. 298.

<sup>62</sup> Ashworth, “Quality and the Roots of Manufacturing ‘Expertise’,” 251.

cases within the metalware trade, the guilds were able to respond to the diversification of the trade and expand their regulation by requiring producers to register multiple marks.



**Figure 1.4: Register of Persons Concerned in the Manufactory of Goods Plated with Silver, 1784, in *Register of Makers Marks* (Sheffield: Sheffield Assay Office, from 1773), 90.**

The registration of marks was therefore a successful way of monitoring producers within a particular trade. It was also used as a way to control the skills and the training of those producers, as it was only a master who had freedom of the

company who was able to register their mark.<sup>63</sup> This meant that they had to have completed their full apprenticeship, presented a proof-piece which demonstrated their skill on acceptance into the guild, and paid their membership fee.<sup>64</sup> The apprenticeship system was designed to teach producers the skills, tacit knowledge and ‘skilled visions’ necessary to produce good-quality metalware.<sup>65</sup> Typically, they lasted seven years, although the precise details needed negotiation between master and apprentice.<sup>66</sup>

There were also further restrictions on the people within a guild, as there were specific criteria that had to be satisfied in order to be made a freeman or journeyman. By-law 31 of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers specified that producers were ‘not to send goods out of the city & c to be wrought not to employ a foreigner’.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, foreigners (‘aliens’), were often prevented from becoming guild members, and therefore working in the trade.<sup>68</sup> S.R. Epstein suggests that these were actually low entrance barriers that gave European guilds an advantage.<sup>69</sup> On one hand, this was

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<sup>63</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/1, ‘Extracts from Acts of Parliament for Preventing Frauds in Gold and Silver Wares’, f. 1.

<sup>64</sup> De Munck, “Artisans, Products and Gifts,” 48.

<sup>65</sup> Cristina Grasseni, *Skilled Visions: Between Apprenticeship and Standards* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), 4.

<sup>66</sup> Patrick Wallis, “Apprenticeship and Training in Premodern England,” *Journal of Economic History* 68/3 (2008), 853.

<sup>67</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07118, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘By-Laws Approved Office Copy’, 1766, f. 65.

<sup>68</sup> Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade*, 3; and Bert De Munck and Anne Winter, eds., *Gated Communities? Regulating Migration in Early Modern Cities* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012).

<sup>69</sup> Epstein and Prak, eds., *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy*; and Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten Van Zanden, *Technology, Skills and the Pre-Modern Economy in the East and the West* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 6.

a way to control the quality and skills of the producers, and ensure that they had been adequately trained and apprenticed based on the guild's regulations in England. However, this in itself was a judgement about what constituted an acceptable skill and who could possess it. The regulation of the people involved in the process can alternatively be seen as a means through which the guilds could prevent competition within the trade from the multitude of Huguenot immigrants in the eighteenth century.<sup>70</sup> The right to make particular products was also reserved for particular groups of individuals, chosen because of their guild membership, training, and their nationality. For example, cutlers were 'engaged in making knives & rasors' but were 'prohibited from making scissors'.<sup>71</sup>

As historians in recent years have shown, the sponsor's mark did not always represent the producer, or all of the workmen who contributed to the production of an object, but it represented the head of the firm or the master who was responsible.<sup>72</sup> The sponsor's mark was part of the hallmark that was applied to all silver and gold goods, and the pewterer's touchmark was applied to all pewter goods. This was regularly emphasised by the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, who in 1698 reaffirmed that 'wares ought to be with the mark of the maker thereof', because they

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<sup>70</sup> Emma Packer, "The Interaction Between English and Huguenot Goldsmiths in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," in *Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Bankers: Innovation and the Transfer of Skill, 1550-1750*, ed. David Mitchell (Oxford: Alden Press, 1995), 85.

<sup>71</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/12, 'Committee on Petitions Relating to Assaying Plate', 18 February 1773, f. 6.

<sup>72</sup> Ellenor Alcorn, *Beyond the Maker's Mark: Paul de Lamerie Silver in the Cahn Collection* (Cambridge: John Adamson, 2007), 22.

were concerned that the practice had been neglected.<sup>73</sup> These marks aimed to instil a sense of trust through the reputation of the guild, that the producer was an honest and skilled person who had undergone the regulated apprenticeship process.<sup>74</sup>

The mark also acted as a form of guarantee to identify the producer of poor-quality metalware.<sup>75</sup> The first thing that the Assay Office checked when they tested an object in silver or gold, was that it was marked with the sponsor's mark. This was to ensure that if an object was tested or inspected and found to be substandard, then the guilty producer could be punished. Fines were often imposed, which as well as being a punishment were used as a form of social control. The punishment of producers emphasised the offender's disobedience rather than their specific misconduct. An analysis of the punishments imposed by the Worshipful Company of Pewterers suggests that there was a shift in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from varying fines, to a consistent fine irrespective of the severity of the offence. Fines in the late-seventeenth century varied depending upon the offence, so Mr Thomas King for example was fined eight shillings for 'bad mettall'.<sup>76</sup> By the mid-eighteenth century, members were more regularly fined five pounds for 'a breach of by law'. For example, this fine was granted to Rebecca White Widow for 'her pott bottom being four grains worse than trifling metal' as 'the penalty of the 26<sup>th</sup> By law'.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> J.S. Forbes, *Hallmark: A History of the London Assay Office* (London: The Goldsmiths' Company, 1999), 163.

<sup>74</sup> De Munck, "The Agency of Branding," 1063.

<sup>75</sup> For a further discussion of the role of the sponsor's mark as a guarantee of quality, see chapter 7 of this thesis.

<sup>76</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Index to the Orders of Court 1691-1740', 15 December 1692, f. 8.

<sup>77</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07104/26, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Rough Court Minutes 1768-1771', 14 December 1769.



Furthermore, regulated fines were often reduced upon an apology and the promise of future good practice. William Froome, for instance, was fined for ‘bad metal and bad workmanship’ in 1766, but was excused ‘on his promise to take more care for the future’ because ‘he was in a bad state of health and very poor’.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, the primary goal of the guilds was to ensure the loyalty and obedience of their members, and the long-term goal of good-quality metalware. Their aims and motivations were intertwined with their practical concerns as an institution. Although the state and guilds were primarily concerned with the material quality of metalware, this concept of quality was also tied to workmanship and the quality, knowledge and skill of a producer.

Penalties within the silver trade were often more severe, due to the need to maintain the legal standard that was associated with coinage. By the late-eighteenth century fines had increased significantly, and producers faced a £100 fine if they failed to register and mark silver or plated goods.<sup>79</sup> The severity of the punishment of fraudulent goods also increased, from a fine of £10 and the risk of imprisonment and hard labour if the producer was unable to pay in 1739, to it being a capital crime to counterfeit a hallmark in 1758.<sup>80</sup> This reflected the severity of the offence, and the fact that it was not just a fraud upon the guilds, or even the public, but upon the monarch and the state. Some historians have debated whether sponsors’ marks were ‘a liability’,

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<sup>78</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07104/25, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Rough Court Minutes 1764-1768’, 11 December 1766.

<sup>79</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/24, “Appendix”, in ‘An Act for Appointing Wardens and Assay-Masters for Assaying Wrought Plate in the Towns of Sheffield and Birmingham’, 1773, f. 298.

<sup>80</sup> Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, G.II.I.4., ‘Notices from the London Gazette’, 1768-73; and *The London Gazette*, Issue 11061 (21 July 1770). However, this was reduced to 14 years transportation in 1772. Forbes, *Hallmark*, 225.

which, because they worked to distinguish substandard metalware, actually disadvantaged producers.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, they were part of a system that provided producers with their political backing, and allowed their members the privilege of using their marks to guarantee the quality of their skills and their products.

## 1.5 Processes

In order to ensure the standard material composition of metalware, some of the guilds developed their own systems of testing and assaying metal goods. This was especially important within the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, who set up Assay Offices with the purpose of testing silver and gold products. Moreover, the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, who undertook urban and regional searches and inspections of pewter goods. On the whole, there was a shift towards more ‘quantitative, systematic, and consolidated’ processes in the eighteenth century.<sup>82</sup> These worked to standardise product quality, and control products earlier in the manufacturing process,<sup>83</sup> and so regulations had to trust that there would not be any ‘diminution or addition’ to their marks after they had been struck upon the products or after they had been inspected by the guilds.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, the move to more quantitative systems of regulation remained intertwined with the need to trust in the individual or the

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<sup>81</sup> Higgins and Tweedale, “Asset or Liability?” 2; and Mara Wilkins, “The Neglected Intangible Asset: The Influence of the Trade Mark on the Rise of the Modern Corporation,” *Business History* 34/1 (1992), 71.

<sup>82</sup> William J. Ashworth, “‘Between the Trader and the Public’: British Alcohol Standards and the Proof of Good Governance,” *Technology and Culture* 42/1 (2001), 50.

<sup>83</sup> Minard, “Micro-economics and Social Construction of the Market,” 165.

<sup>84</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07118, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘By-laws Approved Office Copy’, 1766, ff. 47-48.

institution. William Ashworth has shown that in the alcohol trade there was an increasing use of scientific instruments to measure quality, but that trust in the products remained connected to trust in the instrument maker.<sup>85</sup> The searches undertaken by the Worshipful Company of Pewterers were said to have been carried out by ‘men of approved fidelity & skill in the mistery’, in order that the ‘royall and staple commodity of tynn may bee restored to its primitive glory and esteem’.<sup>86</sup> In this case, producers might also be granted with a certificate from the Worshipful Company of Pewterers to prove that their pewter had been successfully tried.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, the regulation and skill of the people within the guilds also acted to improve the processes used to test metalware, and therefore acted as a better guarantee of quality.

### **1.5.1 The Assay Process**

Through their searches and the assay process, the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths was able to test for and regulate a consistent standard of silver.<sup>88</sup> The process involved a producer taking, or sending, an item of gold or silver to an assay hall where it would be tested, and if found to be of the right standard it was marked with hallmark (Figure 1.5): a sponsor’s mark indicating the producer who was responsible; a standard mark, indicating whether the silver was sterling or Britannia silver; a mark indicating the

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<sup>85</sup> Ashworth, “‘Between the Trader and the Public’,” 35.

<sup>86</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 22214, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Copy of Grievances Concerning Abuses in the Casting & Assaying’, 1674-9, 2.

<sup>87</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 22201, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Certificates of Assay of Tin’, 1651.

<sup>88</sup> For literature on the history of the Assay Offices and the assay process, see Forbes, *Hallmark*; and Jennifer Tann, *Birmingham Assay Office, 1773-1993* (Birmingham: Francis Lomas Ltd, 1993).

town in which it was assayed; and a date letter. For the London Assay Office, the city mark was the leopard's head, 'which was part of the company's arms'.<sup>89</sup> The Sheffield mark - a crown - can be seen on a hallmark on a salt cellar made by the Sheffield firm Morton, Warris, Winter and Roberts, alongside the sponsor's mark 'RM & Co', the lion passant which reflected that it was sterling silver, and the date letter 'E' for the year 1773 in which it was assayed (Figure 1.5).



**Figure 1.5: Salt Cellar, Sterling Silver, Morton, Warris, Winter and Roberts, Sheffield, 1773, Sheffield Assay Office.**

One major change that occurred in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century was a change in the standard of silver. As has been mentioned, the sterling standard was replaced by the Britannia standard, which was imposed between 1697

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<sup>89</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/1, 'Extracts from Acts of Parliament for Preventing Frauds in Gold and Silver Wares', f. 1.

and 1720.<sup>90</sup> Silver objects that successfully passed through the Assay Office were therefore marked with a new image, that of Britannia. This new standard was also to be struck with the lion's head erased, instead of the lion passant.<sup>91</sup> These marks can be seen on a love cup made in Britannia standard silver, whose hallmark displays the sponsor's mark, the Britannia mark, the lion's head erased, and the date letter for 1699 (Figure 1.6).



**Figure 1.6: Love Cup, Britannia Standard Silver, 1699, Sheffield Millennium Gallery, L.1927.3.**

In 1720 the standard reverted back to the old standard because ‘the manufactures of silver, which were made according to the old standard, are more serviceable and durable than those which have been made according to the new

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<sup>90</sup> Eric Turner, *English Silver from 1660* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1985), 15; and Banister, *English Silver*, 25.

<sup>91</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/1, ‘Extracts from Acts of Parliament for Preventing Frauds in Gold and Silver Wares’, f. 6.

standard’.<sup>92</sup> The higher the proportion of silver, the softer an object would be; therefore, it was more difficult for the producer to fashion and less durable for the consumer.<sup>93</sup> With this reinstatement of the sterling standard also came the enforcement of silver standards across Scotland. Producers were given the opportunity to choose between either standard, which were clearly defined, identified and regulated. It was argued that this would not only better accommodate the desires of producers, but also consumers.

The Assay Office tested the material composition of silver to ensure that it was of the exact legal requirement, and not above or below standard. During one investigation, Mr Alchorne an assayer to the master of the mint, explained that ‘he had seen silver between 17 and 18 dwts better than standard’, and claimed that ‘London refiners have lost the art of making silver quite fine’.<sup>94</sup> There was a slight flexibility that allowed 2dwt either way of the required standard. However, there is no record of any producer being punished for having plate that was above standard, although it arose suspicion as above-standard pieces were often placed ‘amongst the bad ones as a kind of convoy’.<sup>95</sup> In contrast, if a piece was found to be substandard, it was defaced and destroyed. Therefore, the process was expensive and time consuming for producers if their work was not accepted. An object had to be finished before it officially went through the assay process, and so if it was then defaced and destroyed

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<sup>92</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/1, ‘Extracts from Acts of Parliament for Preventing Frauds in Gold and Silver Wares’, f. 5.

<sup>93</sup> Banister, *English Silver*, 25-32.

<sup>94</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/7, ‘Notes on the Standard of Silver’, f. 1.

<sup>95</sup> “A Report from the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Manner of Conducting the Assay Offices, 29 April 1773,” in *Reports from Committees of the House of Commons* (Reprinted by Order of the House, 1803), 69.

the producer lost out in terms of the time and expense of the raw materials but also the fashioning and workmanship.

The process adapted to allow for the private assaying of metalware at a producer's request, and so encouraged an additional way to check the material composition of silver. Some producers, before they spent time on the workmanship of an object, sent 'their metal to be assayed by private assayers, for their own satisfaction and security'.<sup>96</sup> Private assayers could also be called upon during a dispute if the Assay Office found an object to be substandard but the producer objected. For example, in a dispute regarding potentially substandard buckles, they were tried at Goldsmiths' Hall but then sent to Mr Pratt a private assayer.<sup>97</sup> The Rough Day Book of the Assay Office at Sheffield increasingly lists private assays from their opening in 1773, however these are not listed in the official plate day book as they were not monitored by the state.<sup>98</sup>

The guilds were also concerned with the quality of the workmanship of metalware. As well as the material composition of an object, the workmanship of silver, gold and silver plate was also checked during the assay process. When an object arrived at the Assay Office, it was the job of a weigher to 'see that the same is a proper state of workmanship for assaying and marking, and not charged with too much

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<sup>96</sup> Parliamentary Papers Online, *Report from the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Manner of Conducting the Several Assay Offices in London, York, Exeter, Bristol, Chester, Norwich and Newcastle upon Tyne*, 1773, 10.

<sup>97</sup> Sheffield City Archives, SAO/2/3/1, Copies of Letters Relating to the Assay Office in Sheffield, 'Letter from Joseph Lucas to the Wardens of the Sheffield Assay Office', 28 October 1776, f. 21.

<sup>98</sup> Sheffield City Archives, SAO/6/1/1/1, 'Rough Day Book 1773-1775'. The Rough Day Book is the hand-written account book detailing the money received and paid out by the Assay Office.

solder'.<sup>99</sup> This inspection required a high degree of specialism and expertise, as the weigher and assayer had to be able to visibly assess the workmanship of an object. According to Matthew Skinner, the Assay Master of the Goldsmiths' Company at Exeter, it was 'impossible for an assay master to judge of the solder necessary for joining a piece of work, unless he was brought up to the trade of a silversmith'.<sup>100</sup> They therefore needed to have the knowledge, and the 'skilled vision' to 'have suspicion of iron or other base metal... concealed in any piece of plate', and the ability to weigh the same in water, and try the effect of magnetism.<sup>101</sup> This is one of the reasons why, out of the regional Assay Offices, only Exeter, Chester and Newcastle still existed in 1773, but that even they struggled to get enough workers.<sup>102</sup> The London goldsmiths argued that there were not enough skilled workers to be able to manage the new regional offices in Birmingham and Sheffield. One report noted that there were 'very few real Goldsmiths, Silversmiths, or Plate-workers in either of those towns'.<sup>103</sup> Another petition argued that 'only four persons (engaged in two partnerships) in the said town and neighbourhood of Sheffield have sent any wrought

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<sup>99</sup> Parliamentary Papers Online, *Report from the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Manner of Conducting the Several Assay Offices in London, York, Exeter, Bristol, Chester, Norwich and Newcastle upon Tyne*, 1773, 1.

<sup>100</sup> "A Report from the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Manner of Conducting the Several Assay Offices, 29 April 1773," in *Reports from Committees of the House of Commons*, Vol. III. (Printed by Order of the House, 1803), 66.

<sup>101</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/24, 'An Act for Appointing Wardens and Assay-Masters for Assaying Wrought Plate in the Towns of Sheffield and Birmingham', 1773, f. 7; and Grasseni, *Skilled Visions*.

<sup>102</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/3, 'Case of the Wardens and Assistants of the Company or Mystery of Goldsmiths of the City of London', 1773, f. 3.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*



plate to be assayed and marked at any assay office'.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, the process relied upon the quality and skill of the people involved in it to be able to assess product quality.

The assay process also had to take into account the workmanship of an object when it came to applying the regulatory marks. In 1731, producers Gabriel Sleath, John LeSage and Richard Bayley complained that the practice of applying each mark of the hallmark a distance apart, 'diminished the beauty' and the finishing of their products.<sup>105</sup> Therefore in some cases, it was the polisher of a product who arranged for it to be assayed before they were polished.<sup>106</sup> This ensured that the product was not tarnished or damaged during the assay. Although there were often conventions about where marks should go, for example on the handle of a spoon, the rim of a tankard, or the base of a salt cellar, the producer had a degree of influence. Producers could mark the object with a dot of ink where they wanted it to be marked. They also attached a slip of paper to their product providing the assayer with any instructions for the marking of the object.<sup>107</sup> One example stated that 'the following is the mark of Green Roberts Mosely & Co of Sheffield which said mark will be struck on their manufactory, IG&C' (Figure 1.7). Another note requested that 'Dickinson will be much obliged to him to be very exact in these ten silver assays, being a purchase - and a considerable quantity'.<sup>108</sup>

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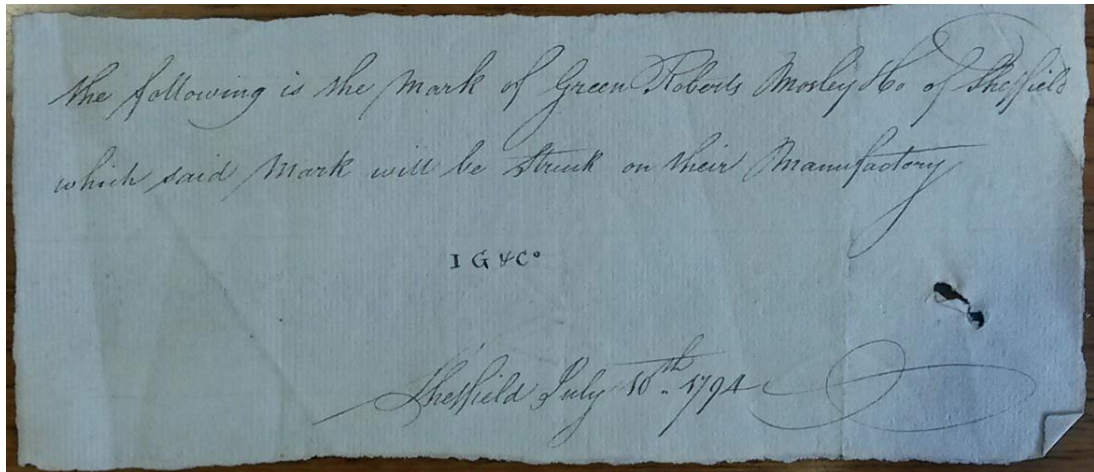
<sup>104</sup> Ibid, f. 1.

<sup>105</sup> Forbes, *Hallmark*, 191.

<sup>106</sup> As explained by Bernard Holbrook, a London agent for the Sheffield firm Hyland and Company, in Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/12, 'Copy Report on Sheffield & Birmingham Assay Office Petitions', f. 8.

<sup>107</sup> Sheffield City Archives, SAO/2/2/1/2, 'Notes Regarding Parcels Sent for Assay'.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 1.7: Notes Regarding Parcels Sent for Assay, Sheffield City Archives, SAO 2/2/1/2.**

There was also an awareness of the practicalities of marking, and so regulations took into account the size of goods. A 1676 notice in the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths allowed exception for goods that could not ‘conveniently bear’ the marks, including those weighing under 1oz.<sup>109</sup> All silver goods went through the Assay Office, other than ‘small wares... and any manufacture of gold and silver so richly engraved, carved, or chased, or set with jewels or stones, as not to admit of an assay to be taken off, or a Mark to be struck thereon, without damaging or defacing the same’.<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, in 1678, a revised notice made it compulsory to hallmark silver vessels, sword hilts, silver buckles, girdles and harnesses.<sup>111</sup> Therefore it was not just the intrinsic qualities of an object that were the concern of the guilds and the producers under their jurisdiction, but also the workmanship and aesthetic qualities of an object.

The main Assay Office was in London, but there had also been Assay Offices in York, Exeter, Bristol, Chester, Norwich and Newcastle by the late-seventeenth

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<sup>109</sup> Forbes, *Hallmark*, 147.

<sup>110</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/1, ‘Extracts from Acts of Parliament for Preventing Frauds in Gold and Silver Wares’, f. 6.

<sup>111</sup> Forbes, *Hallmark*, 147.

century.<sup>112</sup> Assay Offices were typically confined to corporation towns, and so were intertwined with the political reach of the guilds in London.<sup>113</sup> However, many of these regional Assay Offices were closed for long periods of time from their opening to the eighteenth century, as there was reference to their closure or no reference to them at all in some of the regulations. Their authority was re-enforced in 1700, when ‘Goldsmiths, Silversmiths, and Plate-workers, remote from London, are under great difficulties and hardships’, and so the mints ‘lately erected for re-coining silver money’ were used to assay regional goods.<sup>114</sup> The reinstatement of these Assay Offices improved the regional control of the guilds, as ‘every silversmith or plate-worker inhabiting in either of the towns aforesaid, or within twenty-miles... shall enter his name, his mark, and place of abode, with the wardens of that company nearest which

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<sup>112</sup> Parliamentary Papers Online, *Report from the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Manner of Conducting the Several Assay Offices in London, York, Exeter, Bristol, Chester, Norwich and Newcastle upon Tyne*, 1773, 8. The precise dates these Assay Offices operated are unknown. Silver was assayed in York from the mid-sixteenth century; Exeter assay marks appeared on silver from the middle of the sixteenth century; the Chester Assay Office had marked plate from the fifteenth century; Norwich assay marks appeared from the middle of the sixteenth century; and silver was assayed in Newcastle from the mid-seventeenth century. Frederick Bradbury, *Bradbury’s Book of Hallmarks* (Sheffield: Sheffield Assay Office, [1927] 2014), 14-21.

<sup>113</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/23, ‘Memorial Relative to Assaying and Marking Wrought Plate at Birmingham, &c.’, ff. 2-3.

<sup>114</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/1, ‘Extracts from Acts of Parliament for Preventing Frauds in Gold and Silver Wares’, f. 4. (Stat. 12. Will. III. Cap. 4)

he shall reside'.<sup>115</sup> A statute at the start of the reign of Queen Anne, reaffirmed that any producer who refused to do so, would have to forfeit their plate.<sup>116</sup>

The authority of the guilds therefore had a limited and defined reach. Despite their expansion in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth century, Birmingham and Sheffield had remained outside guild control because they were not classed as cities and so had no royal charter.<sup>117</sup> Nevertheless, producers beyond the parameters of the guilds could also adopt the same standards and conventions. One candlestick, made in Sheffield in 1765 by the producer Thomas Law, was marked with 'STERLING' (Figure 1.8). As this was before the opening of the Assay Office in Sheffield, producers in Sheffield were not required to hallmark their goods, although their silver had to be of the legal standard. Many producers chose to send their silver to Chester, Newcastle or London to be hallmarked, but this movement of goods was expensive and often damaged the items in transit. Thomas Law instead chose to mark his candlestick with 'STERLING', which emphasised that the object was the legal standard of silver.<sup>118</sup> This suggests that guild and state regulations still reached the regional towns, even without their own Assay Offices. However, these marks did not have the political weight of the guilds and state, and they did not reflect the trust in the assay process; therefore, producers in Birmingham and Sheffield petitioned for the

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<sup>115</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/24, 'An Act for Appointing Wardens and Assay-Masters for Assaying Wrought Plate in the Towns of Sheffield and Birmingham', 1773, f. 8.

<sup>116</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/1, 'Extracts from Acts of Parliament for Preventing Frauds in Gold and Silver Wares', f. 4. (Stat. 1. Ann. Cap. 9)

<sup>117</sup> Eric Hopkins, *Birmingham: The First Manufacturing Town in the World 1760-1840* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), 4.

<sup>118</sup> The candlestick has recently been tested by the Sheffield Assay Office and was found to be of the correct standard.

opening of new provincial Assay Offices in Birmingham and Sheffield in 1773.<sup>119</sup> Despite opposition from the London goldsmiths, they were granted permission from the state, and so opened in 1773. The Birmingham Assay Office took the mark of an anchor, and the Sheffield Office a crown, a decision reputedly made by a coin-toss. The act described these marks as ‘the peculiar marks of the said company’, but they allowed the regional producers who controlled the regional Assay Offices to develop their own identities and reputation.<sup>120</sup>



**Figure 1.8: Candlestick, Sterling Silver, Thomas Law, 1765, Sheffield Assay Office.**

Therefore, at times, the guilds renegotiated their rights and privileges, adapting the system to suit their needs. On another occasion, the producers also debated whether members should get special privileges, and cheaper fees at the Assay Office. A minute book of a special committee for parliamentary business, held at the Goldsmiths’ Hall

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<sup>119</sup> For an analysis of the petitions for new Assay Offices in 1773, see chapter 5. See also, Tann, *Birmingham Assay Office*, especially 1-24.

<sup>120</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/24, ‘An Act for Appointing Wardens and Assay-Masters for Assaying Wrought Plate in the Towns of Sheffield and Birmingham’, 1773, f. 4.

in 1737, outlined a decade long debate during which members discussed how to form a petition to Parliament proposing new fees for the assaying of metal goods.<sup>121</sup> Initially, the committee agreed that ‘small wares made by persons not free of this company should pay higher prizes for the assaying and marking’ because ‘the members of the company are at great expence in... the management & execution of the Assay Office’.<sup>122</sup> It was therefore proposed that persons not free of the company should pay twice as much as the freemen. Despite much negotiation, this proposal soon reduced to ‘half as much more as the freemen’, and was finalised with the decision not to charge more as it ‘might endanger the success of the intended Bill’.<sup>123</sup> The main aim of the bill was the prevention of frauds and abuses; therefore, it was necessary that the assay process was accessible to all. The guild reluctantly recognised that, in order for the assay process to be successful and to receive the necessary support from the state, it had to choose not to enforce some of its potential privileges.

Although the assaying of silver was generally an effective and efficient process, it was susceptible to corruption. It was a human process with relationships, opportunism, frauds and deceptions. Assay officers were regularly bribed so that they marked silver that was substandard.<sup>124</sup> In line with their aim to maintain a standard quality and prevent fraudulent behaviour, there were many changes to the assay

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<sup>121</sup> Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, G.II.II.4., ‘Minute Book of a Special Committee for Parliament Business’, 1737, f. 2.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, f. 4.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, f. 18.

<sup>124</sup> For example, producers sent gifts of liquor as a bribe. However, a marginal note made by George Fair, the Clerk of a House of Commons committee, during his investigation into Assay Office corruption, joked that one producer’s work was so substandard ‘even liquor could not save his work from being broken’. Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, G.II.II.5., ‘Committee on the Assay Office’, 1773, f. 12.

process throughout the eighteenth century in an attempt to prevent corruption. In particular, the roles within the Assay Office were fragmented, so that the assay officer ‘takes the scrapings from the plate, and knows the name of the silversmith whose plate he scrapes’, but the drawer who tests the scrapings does not see the name, so that ‘if a drawer was inclined to favour any silversmith, he knows of no means to detect him’.<sup>125</sup> This process was illustrated in the goldsmith William Badcock’s *Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares* (Figure 1.9), which was designed as a ‘manual for goldsmiths and all other persons, whether buyers, sellers, or wearers of any manner of Goldsmiths work’ to understand the regulation of the trade.<sup>126</sup> As Figure 1.9 shows, the folding of the paper in which the silver scrapings and then the copel of silver was kept, ensured that the process was clearly organised, and encouraged the efficient communication between the assayers and the owner or producer of the sample of silver.

In some ways, the fragmentation of the assay process increased the potential for fraud, as more people were involved in the process. A petition against frauds in the silver trade in 1773 points out the potential for deceit by the numerous people involved in the process: the workman who took the product to the office, the assayer who marked the object, the fireman who could deceive the assayer, the person who put the sample into the diet box, and the person who melted that which was in the diet box.<sup>127</sup> However, by having more people involved in the process, there were also more

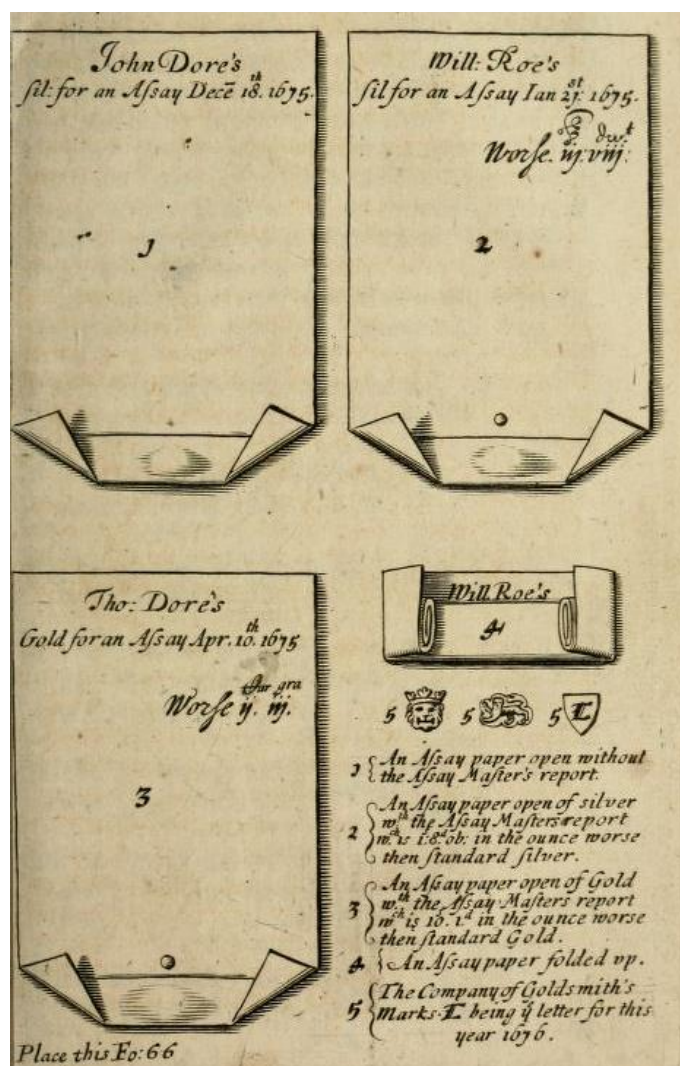
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<sup>125</sup> Parliamentary Papers Online, *Report from the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Manner of Conducting the Several Assay Offices in London, York, Exeter, Bristol, Chester, Norwich and Newcastle upon Tyne*, 1773, 8.

<sup>126</sup> For an expanded analysis of Badcock’s *Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares*, see chapters 2 and 8 of this thesis.

<sup>127</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/5, ‘Upon Frauds by London, Birmingham and Sheffield Silversmiths’, f. 2.

opportunities to detect fraudulent behaviour. These changes attempted to make the processes involved in the regulation of the trade more efficient, and ensure that the people involved in those processes could be trusted to guarantee quality.



**Figure 1.9: William Badcock, *A Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares* (London: Printed for John Bellinger and Thomas Bassett, 1677), 39.**

Another quality control, and way to ensure that the process could be trusted, was the annual testing of the accuracy of the Assay Office through the Trial of the Pyx, by the state at the Palace of Westminster.<sup>128</sup> This had always been a part of the

<sup>128</sup> Forbes, *Hallmark*, 40.



assay process, and involved the production of trial pieces from the samples that were placed in the diet box at each assay, which were taken to the mint in London to be tested by his or her majesty's assay master.<sup>129</sup> Protections were therefore in place to try and prevent corruption. This was of importance to the state because they needed to ensure that silver was of the legal standard so that it could be legal tender if it was melted down into coinage. Whilst the guilds and regional corporations controlled and governed the assay process, 'the ultimate judgement of the fineness of the metals is reserved for the officers of the King's mint'.<sup>130</sup> Therefore, the standard mark, or the lion passant, had always been referred to as 'the King's mark'.<sup>131</sup> This emphasises the way in which guild and state interests were intertwined, and both used their political authority to control product quality, and instil trust in the regulatory system.

With the opening of new Assay Offices in Birmingham and Sheffield in 1773, there were additional quality controls put in place. The new assay masters had to swear an oath of office in person in London, and so remained connected to the guilds, who placed their trust in their management of the assay process.<sup>132</sup> More importantly, the new assay masters Daniel Bradbury in Sheffield and James Jackson in Birmingham, were personally liable for any negligent or fraudulent behaviour, and upon being

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<sup>129</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/24, 'An Act for Appointing Wardens and Assay-Masters for Assaying Wrought Plate in the Towns of Sheffield and Birmingham', 1773, f. 14.

<sup>130</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/23, 'Memorial Relative to Assaying and Marking Wrought Plate at Birmingham &c.', ff. 2-3.

<sup>131</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/1, 'Extracts from Acts of Parliament for Preventing Frauds in Gold and Silver Wares', f. 1.

<sup>132</sup> Sheffield City Archives, SAO/2/3/1, 'Copies of Letters Relating to the Assay Office in Sheffield', 6 July 1773, f. 1.

sworn into their roles entered into a bond of £500.<sup>133</sup> This helped to establish trust in the process. The physical stamps that were used to apply the marks were also tightly controlled. In order to try and prevent their misuse, the marks were ‘locked up in a box with three different locks, and the respective keys thereof shall be kept by two of the wardens and assayer of such respective company’.<sup>134</sup> Their use was also restricted, so that it ‘shall never be taken there out but in the presence of two of the said wardens and assayer for the purpose of marking the plate’, and that the marking should also occur ‘in the presence of two of the said wardens and assayer’.<sup>135</sup> Again, the process tried to use the people to provide protection from corruption, generate trust and better guarantee product quality.

Producers claimed that assay officers still showed favouritism, and gave certain individuals special treatment. William Hancock, a producer in Sheffield, argued that ‘his work had been injured at Goldsmiths Hall, by scraping; and believes the scrapers may shew favour in scraping where they think fit’; however, on ‘the advice of his polisher... he went to Goldsmiths Hall, and gave some drink to the assay master and scraper’.<sup>136</sup> He argued that, since then, he ‘observed his plate has been less damaged in scraping’.<sup>137</sup> Therefore, the process could be abused and manipulated to the benefit, or detriment, of the individual producer and wider trade. Samuel Garbett,

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/24, ‘An Act for Appointing Wardens and Assay-Masters for Assaying Wrought Plate in the Towns of Sheffield and Birmingham’, 1773, f. 11.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Parliamentary Papers, *Report from the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Manner of Conducting the Several Assay Offices in London, York, Exeter, Bristol, Chester, Norwich and Newcastle upon Tyne*, 1773, 10.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

a Birmingham producer who campaigned for the new regional Assay Offices, acknowledged that ‘the power of marking wrought plate is an important trust’.<sup>138</sup> The state, the guilds, and the consumers of silver goods, needed to trust the assayers and the people involved in the process. Although the Assay Office was ultimately focused upon the material quality of an object, the changes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries show that they were equally concerned with controlling the producers, the process, and preventing institutional corruption.

## **Conclusion**

The institutional structure of the guilds in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries worked to try and standardise and thus guarantee the quality of metalware. Through the control of products, people and processes, the guilds established their authority in conjunction with the state, and tried to generate trust in the regulatory system. All three areas were interlinked, and so the guilds used apprenticeships to ensure that producers had the skills to make quality products and manage the regulatory processes, and in turn used the processes, especially the registration of sponsors’ marks and the testing of the material composition of metalware, to provide a guarantee of product quality that placed more trust in the producer and the guilds. Moreover, the changes that the guilds made and the ways in which they adapted in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially the increased fragmentation of the assay process, aimed to prevent corruption and better guarantee quality. This study of the metalware trades contributes to recent historiographical debates about the role of the guilds and state in

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<sup>138</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/41, ‘Letter from Samuel Garbett’, 9 May 1773, f. 2.

the deliberation of product quality.<sup>139</sup> Although they faced new challenges from the late-seventeenth century, and a certain degree of inefficiency and corruption, the guilds and state were able to adapt their regulations to better regulate the quality of metalware. As a result, these regulatory institutions continued to influence the conventions of quality that spread to the producer, retailer and consumer.

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<sup>139</sup> De Munck, “Guilds, Product Quality and Intrinsic Value,” 103-124; and Ashworth, “Quality and the Roots of Manufacturing ‘Expertise’,” 231-254.

## Chapter 2.

### Flexible Regulations in the Expansion of the Trade

Whilst guilds had been in existence from the fourteenth century, they had to adapt in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in response to the expansion of the trade, in order to maintain their control of the quality of metal goods.<sup>1</sup> They had long been influenced by petitions and calls for regulation by their members, groups of producers, or the public, and had sought to influence state regulation and the behaviour of their members. From the late-seventeenth century, the guilds increasingly relied upon the state to enforce their authority, and consumers to report and prosecute substandard metalware. Philippe Minard argues that this was part of a wider shift from the notion of ‘regulated quality’, as defined by the guilds and state, to a ‘deliberated quality’ determined by the wider public.<sup>2</sup> This chapter challenges the binary nature of this view, and argues that the guilds continued to play a part in establishing the conventions of quality that spread from regulators to producers and consumers. The guilds were flexible institutions that adapted in response to the expansion of the trade and used

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths first obtained its charter in 1327; the Worshipful Company of Cutlers obtained its royal charter in 1416; and the Worshipful Company of Pewterers obtained its charter in 1474.

<sup>2</sup> Philippe Minard, “Micro-Economics and Social Construction of the Market: Disputes Among the London Leather Trades in the Eighteenth-Century,” *Historical Social Research* 36/4 (2011), 150. See also, Christian Bessy, “Institutions and Conventions of Quality,” *Historical Social Research* 37/4 (2012), 19; and Bert De Munck, “Guilds, Product Quality and Intrinsic Value: Towards a History of Conventions?” *Historical Social Research* 36/4 (2011): 103-124.

consumers to enforce their standards of quality.<sup>3</sup> Although this gave consumers a greater influence in the deliberation of quality, and so led to the increasing importance of novelty and fashionability, consumers were encouraged to understand and value the priorities of the guilds, notably the intrinsic value of metalware and its workmanship.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter shows that there were three key areas in which the guilds adapted in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: they re-issued or adapted their regulations on a regular basis; they responded to petitions from their members and the public, and influenced statutory regulation by creating their own petitions; and most importantly they disseminated knowledge about the regulation of the trade to consumers so that they were able to help enforce guild regulations and report substandard metalware. The first part of the chapter questions the extent to which the authority of the guilds declined, and their regulations were challenged or resisted. In particular, it was the ability and legal right of the guilds to search private property that was called into question. However, as it shows, the guilds did not decline to the extent to which literature has suggested, but maintained their influence because of their

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<sup>3</sup> This builds upon the argument in chapter 1 that the guilds' primary goal, especially within the silver and pewter trades, was to guarantee the intrinsic quality of metalware. In doing so, they were not allowed to profit, and they were prepared to forgo certain privileges in order to better regulate the trade. Therefore, in order to analyse the influence and impact of guild regulations on the deliberation of quality, it is crucial to understand their goals and how they met them, rather than solely looking at their success as an institution.

<sup>4</sup> The increasing importance of novelty and fashionability will be explored throughout this thesis, especially chapters 3, 5 and 8. See also, Barbara Bettoni, "Usefulness, Ornamental Function and Novelty: Debates on Quality in Button and Buckle Manufacturing in Northern Italy (Eighteenth to Nineteenth Centuries)," in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture, 1500-1900*, ed. Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 171-207.

flexibility.<sup>5</sup> The chapter then explores the ways in which the regulation of the metalware trade was not just enforced and determined by the guilds but was also influenced by external factors, for example when the guilds petitioned the state, or producers or consumers petitioned the guilds to call for improved regulation. Therefore, the authority of the guilds should not be seen in isolation. Finally, this chapter analyses the ways in which the guilds adapted their regulation in response to the expansion of the trade. It argues that they acted as flexible institutions and increasingly involved the consumer in order to detect substandard metalware and manage quality across the expanding metalware trades. By placing more of the burden of quality deliberation on the consumer, the guilds used the public to enforce particular standards of quality.

## 2.1 A Decline in the Guilds?

The guilds and state worked together to regulate the quality of the metalware trades. More specifically, they attempted to control the people, the products and the processes involved in the production of a wide range of metalware, especially silver and pewter.

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<sup>5</sup> Much of the scholarship surrounding the guilds argues that there was a guild decline from the seventeenth century. See, for example, Antony Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European and Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (London: Methuen & Co, 1984), 167; and John Forbes, “Search, Immigration and the Goldsmiths’ Company: A Study in the Decline of its Powers,” in *Guilds, Society and Economy in London 1450-1800*, ed. Ian Anders Gadd and Patrick Wallis (London: Centre for Metropolitan History, 2002), 97. However, recent scholarship has begun to describe the guilds as flexible institutions, for example Bert De Munck, Piet Lourens and Jan Lucassen, “The Establishment and Distribution of Craft Guilds in the Low Countries, 1000-1800,” in *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries: Work, Power, and Representation*, ed. Maarten Prak, Catharina Lis, Jan Lucassen, and Hugo Soly (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 32.

Through statutes, the guilds had the authority to ensure that all producers were a member, registered their marks, and maintained a set standard quality of materials and workmanship. The regulations imposed by the guilds may have been authoritative in theory, but they became increasingly difficult to enforce as the metalware trades expanded in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As a result of the increasing number of producers, the development of new products and the materials, and expanding regional manufacturing towns, the authority of the guilds over these new products and places of production, and their ability to maintain searches and prosecute substandard ware, was called into question.

The literature on guilds suggests that the expansion of their productive activities led to a widespread decline in the authority of the guilds from the seventeenth century.<sup>6</sup> Historians, most notably Patrick Wallis and John Forbes have pointed out that the guilds struggled to regulate the trade as it expanded, and faced resistance from their own members who continued to negligently and fraudulently produce substandard metalware, and so they had to rely more heavily upon parliamentary legislation.<sup>7</sup> Across Europe, Bert De Munck suggests this ‘decline’ in the guilds’ ability to regulate the trade diminished their political standing, and so caused a shift in the perception of quality as it was no longer connected to the guilds’ political

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<sup>6</sup> Maarten Prak, “Corporate Politics in the Low Countries: Guilds as Institutions, 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries,” in *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries*, 74.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Wallis, “Controlling Commodities: Search and Reconciliation in the Early Modern Livery Companies,” in *Guilds, Society and Economy in London 1450-1800*, ed. Ian Anders Gadd and Patrick Wallis (London: Centre for Metropolitan History, 2002), 85-100; Forbes, “Search, Immigration and the Goldsmiths’ Company,” 115-125; and Black, *Guilds and Civil Society*, 167.



authority.<sup>8</sup> In England, these changes were also linked to a decline in the power of the monarchy, from whom the guilds received their charters and authority to enforce their regulations.<sup>9</sup>

This chapter argues that the guilds' authority took on a number of transformations, which did not directly result in their decline, and should instead be seen as a longer-term shift in how they carried out their aims. This study of the metalware trades supports the idea that the guilds were 'flexible' institutions.<sup>10</sup> The role of the guilds could shift over time, and they balanced their formal regulations with informal customs and practices that equally worked to control product quality.<sup>11</sup> In particular, it was their enforcement of ordinances and their use of, and response to, petitions that was flexible.<sup>12</sup>

There was an increasing specialisation within the guild system from the late-seventeenth century. New guilds emerged, for example, the Worshipful Company of Needlemakers, which was granted its charter in 1656, the Worshipful Company of Tin Platers in 1670, and the Gold and Silver Wyre Drawers' Company in 1693. Guilds also expanded in number across Austria, the Dutch Republic, Sweden and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>13</sup> This suggests that there was a perceived benefit to the segmentation of the

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<sup>8</sup> Bert De Munck, "The Agency of Branding and the Location of Value: Hallmarks and Monograms in Early Modern Tableware Industries," *Business History* 54/7 (2012), 1068.

<sup>9</sup> Forbes, "Search, Immigration and the Goldsmiths' Company," 97, 115.

<sup>10</sup> De Munck, Lourens and Lucassen, "The Establishment and Distribution of Craft Guilds," 32.

<sup>11</sup> Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, "Technology as a Public Culture in the Eighteenth Century: The Artisans' Legacy," *History of Science* 45/2 (2007), 139.

<sup>12</sup> Wallis, "Controlling Commodities," 97.

<sup>13</sup> Harald Deceulaer, "Entrepreneurs in the Guilds: Ready-to-wear Clothing and Subcontracting in Late Sixteenth-Century Antwerp," *Textile History* 31/2 (2000), 134.

guild system. Sheilagh Ogilvie argues that the appeal of the guilds may have been their social capital, rather than a belief that they could efficiently regulate their trade.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, by looking at the establishment of these new guilds, it is possible to better understand how they saw their purpose in the changing context in which they were established. The Worshipful Company of Tin Platers claimed that they were established to uphold only ‘such laws and regulations as are for the good of the whole’.<sup>15</sup> However, they encountered opposition by producers who argued that they ‘don’t care to be subject to any rule or order’ and so ‘entered into a sort of a combination by raising money among themselves to oppose the good design of the company’.<sup>16</sup> In response, the new guild claimed that any opposition was ‘in prejudice and ignorance’, and they emphasised the potential benefit that their imposed regulations would bring, because ‘if they have no such power... it may not introduce great confusions and disorders’.<sup>17</sup> This suggests that, despite some resistance amongst producers in these trades, there was also the opinion that the guilds were a useful institution with which metalware could be regulated and quality could be maintained.

Many of the new guilds were specialisations of existing trades, which focused on particular products or materials in order to provide more effective regulation and quality control. This allowed the guilds to respond to the expansion of the trade and re-evaluate their position when there was a period of economic, social or technological

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<sup>14</sup> Sheilaigh Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade: Merchant Guilds 1000-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07138/1, Worshipful Company of Tin Platers, ‘Miscellaneous Salvaged Papers’, 1666-1781.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

change.<sup>18</sup> The fragmentation of the guild system also occurred elsewhere in Europe, such as Geneva, where the different stages of the production of watches were divided under the jurisdiction of different guilds.<sup>19</sup> New guilds could also be used to try and revive a struggling trade, or tackle a specific problem through regulation. For example, although producers of pins and needles had previously come under the authority of other guilds, by establishing their own guild they aimed to better regulate the trade, improve product quality, and restore the market for their products.<sup>20</sup> They petitioned the state because ‘few amongst have either credit or money to purchase wyre from the Merchant at the best hand, for the making of theyer pinns’.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, ‘for want of stock’, they were ‘forced to buy theyr wyre in small pelts from hand to mouth of ye second and third buyer’.<sup>22</sup> According to the petition, the ‘whole sale haberdashers’ and ‘other retailing shopkeepers’ took advantage of the ‘poore workmen’, so that they were forced to sell the pins for less than the materials cost them. They also appealed to the state by suggesting that the monarch would earn ‘a cleere yearely proffitt of £4000 per annum’ by changing the duty on imported foreign pins.<sup>23</sup> The establishment of the guild therefore had the potential to improve the lives of producers, and act on behalf of their collective interests, even into the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Berlin, “‘Broken all in Pieces’: Artisans and the Regulation of Workmanship in Early Modern London,” in *The Artisan and the European Town, 1500-1900*, ed. Geoffrey Crossick (Aldershot: Scholar, 1997), 75.

<sup>19</sup> Ulrich Pfister, “Craft Guilds, the Theory of the Firm, and Early Modern Proto-industry,” in *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy, 1400-1800*, ed. S.R. Epstein and Maarten Prak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 42.

<sup>20</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 03621, Worshipful Company of Pinmakers, ‘Petition to Charles II Proposing Partnership with the Crown for Revival of the Trade’, c. 1675.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Existing guilds also had to adapt to maintain their authority when faced with the expansion of the metalware trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Whilst guild officials had previously been able to undertake searches to monitor the quality of metal goods and prevent substandard metalware, it became difficult to do so when there was an increasing number of producers across England, and expanding spaces involved in the production and retail of metalware. Until the mid-eighteenth century, there were records of searches across the country, however it was only the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths and the Worshipful Company of Pewterers who had any significant search provisions in place.<sup>24</sup> According to by-law 32 of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, searches were to be undertaken ‘five times in the year or oftner if need shall require’ across England, to check for substandard pewter or brass.<sup>25</sup> The Warwick quarter sessions discuss the presence of regional searches, and show that in the late-seventeenth century, searches for substandard pewter were undertaken in houses, shops, warehouses and workshops across Warwick.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, searches continued to be undertaken even if they were not entirely effective.

Whilst most searches reported the trade to be deemed ‘in good order’, there was defective work found on nearly every search. One report described the successful seizure of four hundred weight of metal in Cornwall, which was broke by order of the Master and Wardens ‘as defective metal & workmanship’.<sup>27</sup> Those found guilty of

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<sup>24</sup> Ronald F. Homer, “The Pewterer’s Company’s Country Searches and the Company’s Regulation of Prices,” in *Guilds, Society and Economy in London 1450-1800*, ed. Ian Anders Gadd and Patrick Wallis (London: Centre for Metropolitan History, 2002), 97.

<sup>25</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07116, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Transcripts of Charter and Bye-Laws’, 1702, f. 78.

<sup>26</sup> Homer, “The Pewterer’s Company’s Country Searches,” 105.

<sup>27</sup> Guildhall library, MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Index to the Orders of Court 1691-1740’, 11 May 1693, f. 26.

substandard or unmarked pewter, were fined one penny per pound weight.<sup>28</sup> The difficulty in administering searches in the expanding spaces of production across England was exacerbated by a lack of qualified search officials. It was necessary for search officials to have a high degree of expertise, so ‘very few persons could be found skilfull to search (except the company of pewterers in London)’.<sup>29</sup> In most cases, it was London pewterers who travelled to the suburbs to undertake searches at the turn of the eighteenth century. This usually occurred at times of crisis, when ‘there hath been an omission of country searches for many years’ and when ‘the company has received information that the great abuses committed in many places in the country... [which] lessens the reputation’ of the guild and the trade as a whole.<sup>30</sup> The London goldsmiths also experienced a struggle to find enough wardens who had the skill and capability to perform the task, as ‘the trade is soe much increased both in and about London and other parts of this realme’.<sup>31</sup> The guilds therefore faced new challenges when enforcing their regulations across the expanding regional manufacturing towns.

## 2.2 Resistance

The expansion of the metalware trade therefore made it increasingly difficult to enforce the guilds’ standards of quality. However, there had always been an informal

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<sup>28</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07116, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Transcripts of Charter and Bye-Laws’, 1702, ff. 83-84.

<sup>29</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 222198/1, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Papers Relating to Country Searches, 1660-1839’.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, G.II.II.1., ‘Draft for Bill for Various Reforms in the Goldsmiths Trade’, 1661, f. 7.

sector of the trade and a black market for fraudulent goods.<sup>32</sup> The sheer scale of offending, and the extent to which the guilds had to regularly re-affirm their authority, suggests that there was some disregard to their regulations. In part, this was due to the high degree of skill that was needed to produce metal goods of the required intrinsic standard and workmanship. In the eighteenth century it remained difficult to standardise production, so producers occasionally failed to meet the guilds' standards if they were careless or negligent. The regularity of the offences also suggests that some frauds were becoming widespread practices. Many of the guild officials were themselves found guilty of producing substandard metalware.<sup>33</sup> For example, between 1709 and 1710, twenty-one 'wardens and assistants of the right Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths' were found to have gold and silver goods that were 'worse than standard'.<sup>34</sup> The London goldsmiths were accused of showing leniency towards their members. One producer from Birmingham, who was found to have produced substandard metalware, complained that 'I am not the only delinquent that can be mark'd out.... many workmen of this city in London are equally guilty and possibly more so'.<sup>35</sup>

The guilds were constantly developing and evolving, and so chose to re-issue ordinances and re-evaluate their regulations at particular points.<sup>36</sup> This was especially the case at times of political upheaval, for example during and after the English Civil

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<sup>32</sup> Ogilvie, *Institutions and European Trade*, 39.

<sup>33</sup> Wallis, "Controlling Commodities," 96.

<sup>34</sup> Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, J.V.I.12., 'Small Collection of Miscellaneous Papers Relative to the Regulation of the Trade'.

<sup>35</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/36, 'Letter Benjamin May to Matthew Boulton' [Copy Letter Benjamin May to John Carter 1 May 1771], 21 April 1773.

<sup>36</sup> Minard, "Micro-Economics and Social Construction of the Market," 151.

War in the 1640s and 1650s, when the guilds worked harder to enforce their regulations.<sup>37</sup> Regulations were at their most effective when they were negotiated locally and nationally, by interested parties.<sup>38</sup> They often enforced and regulated customs that already existed, that were already perceived as common standards of quality.<sup>39</sup> Later, in the eighteenth century, the guilds re-evaluated their regulations to adapt based on what had become common practice, to clarify their regulations and ensure that there was clearer guidance on their enforcement. The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths wrote to Mr Ashurst, a lawyer in London, between 1767 and 1769 to get legal advice about whether to prosecute a case of substandard metalware.<sup>40</sup> They debated whether the early charters of the guild and regulations, which specified which objects could be gilded with silver and which marks were allowed on them, were enforceable by common law. Mr Ashurst advised that because in the case in question ‘no such fraud was intended, I think it wd hardly be worth the while of an opulent & respectable company to engage in a prosecution’.<sup>41</sup> He reasoned that although the law had not been repealed, the behaviour in question was such common practice that it was no longer seen as illegal, and that ‘even were the prosecution to succeed upon the ground of the stat H. 5 it is very probable that a repeal of the act cd very soon follow’.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Berlin, “‘Broken all in Pieces’,” 78.

<sup>38</sup> Mark Knights, “Regulation and Rival Interests in the 1690s,” in *Regulating the British Economy, 1660-1850*, ed. Perry Gauci (London: Ashgate, 2011), 63.

<sup>39</sup> Philippe Minard, “Facing Uncertainty: Markets, Norms and Conventions in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Regulating the British Economy, 1660-1850*, ed. Perry Gauci (London: Ashgate, 2011), 185.

<sup>40</sup> Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, G.II.IV.2., ‘Counsels Opinion as Two Cases Involving Fraudulent Attempts to Obtain the Co Marks on Counterfeit Articles’, 1769.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 1767.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 1769.

Therefore, the flexibility of the guilds allowed them to adapt in response to resistance to their ordinances, whether that meant to re-enforce their by-laws or update the formal systems of regulation to reflect the informal practices of its members.

Nevertheless, there were also fraudulent practices across the trade, and the intentional production of deceptive and substandard metalware. Some producers wanted to profit by any means, and those who chose to use illegal methods tended to pass-off lower value types of metalware such as pewter and tin, as higher value types of metalware such as silver. For example, in 1748, John Walker was found guilty of trying to sell pewter buttons for silver.<sup>43</sup> By doing so, individuals hoped to be able to charge significantly higher prices for metal goods, as occurred when Elizabeth Trott was accused of attempting to sell a pewter tankard ‘wash’d with silver’, for the price of £7 5s instead of its actual value of 10s.<sup>44</sup> This means of deception reoccurred in criminal records and newspaper reports, for example in 1748 when an individual was accused of ‘selling watches with pewter-cases double washed for silver’.<sup>45</sup> Whilst the regulations of the guilds and state tried to prevent these possible deceptions, such as through the testing and marking of metalware, there were numerous ways in which producers altered their metal goods in an attempt to deceive guild officials and potential consumers. Some fraudulent goldsmiths illegally cut a hallmark from one piece of silver that had successfully passed through the assay process, and soldered it onto substandard product to give the illusion that it was of the legal standard.<sup>46</sup> Others, such as the producer of a pewter plate-warmer (Figure 2.1), put imitative hallmarks on

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<sup>43</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, 20 April 1748, trial of John Walker (t17480420-1).

<sup>44</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, 27 April 1715, trial of Elizabeth Trott (t17150427-8).

<sup>45</sup> *Derby Mercury*, 27 May 1748.

<sup>46</sup> J.S. Forbes, *Hallmark: A History of the London Assay Office* (London: The Goldsmiths’ Company, 1999), 98.



pewter, that could only legally be used on silver. There were therefore different levels of guild resistance, from those who failed to meet the guilds' standards of quality, to those who intentionally produced substandard or deceptive metalware.



**Figure 2.1: Plate-Warmer, Pewter, Sheffield Millennium Gallery, L.1938.316.**

There was also direct and explicit opposition to the guilds' authority, especially an increasingly vocal resistance to their right to undertake regional searches. During the guilds' searches, goods that were judged to be substandard were broken immediately, which left little room for appeal before they were damaged, and meant that it was a frustrating and costly process for producers. Widow Langley, a pewterer, complained in 1695 that guild assistants had wrongly broken her dishes on the last

search because they were judged to be insufficiently wrought, but she claimed that they were well wrought.<sup>47</sup> This led to resistance during searches, where producers verbally and physically attacked search officials. The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths complained that ‘the wardens have frequently, in their searches, been opposed, insulted and threatened... above one hundred times’.<sup>48</sup> Mr Jennings, in 1700, refused to let the searchers see his goods, and threatened that ‘if Mr Snell one of the wardens, sent for a constable to break open his glass, he would shoot him through the head’.<sup>49</sup> The court records of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers suggests an increasing resistance to their searches, and show that producers such as Robert Pilkington were regularly fined for abusive language during a search.<sup>50</sup>

The guilds’ authority therefore experienced a shift in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They faced increasing resistance from those producers who resisted the authority of the guilds and argued that the guilds had no right to enter their property, destroy their goods, or demand fines. The authority of the guilds was legally disputed, leading to the Worshipful Company of Pewterers seeking the advice of lawyers in 1722.<sup>51</sup> Gradually, the guilds lost their right to demand fines and unpaid membership directly, and instead had to sue for the amounts through the courts. As one of many examples, Edward Drew, a pewterer in London, was summoned to the guild’s court in 1738 for ‘making his spoons 27 grains worse than tin & for insulting

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<sup>47</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Index to the Orders of Court 1691-1740’, 19 December 1695, f. 10.

<sup>48</sup> Parliamentary Papers Online, *Sixth Parliament of Great Britain: Fourth Session* (20 January 1726 - 24 May 1726), 7 April 1726, 656.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Index to the Orders of Court 1691-1740’, 20 March 1705, f. 13.

<sup>51</sup> Homer, “The Pewterer’s Company’s Country Searches,” 107.

& resisting the master & wardens in their search'.<sup>52</sup> It was ordered that he pay a £4 fine, but he 'dispute[d] the authority of the court'.<sup>53</sup> The Worshipful Company of Pewterers had to employ their lawyer Mr Sparrow to retrieve the £4 fine that had not been paid.<sup>54</sup> This can be seen as part of a wider rejection of institutional authority, in support of individual rights and private property.<sup>55</sup> It has been argued that this developed in response to a wider shift in regulatory authority from the monarch to the state.<sup>56</sup> Therefore the authority of the guilds, and their ability to enforce particular standards of quality, was tied to wider political and social changes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Nevertheless, the disobedience of some producers and their challenging of guild regulation needs to put in perspective. The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths found that only between 1 and 2 percent of goods were substandard around 1700.<sup>57</sup> Although this resistance to the guilds' regulations could be seen to diminish the guilds' authority, as they struggled to enforce their standards of quality across the whole trade, it also shows their ability to adapt and work with other formal and informal systems of regulation. Moreover, as the rest of this chapter shows, this worked to their advantage, as it encouraged a wider process of quality control in which the public were increasingly involved in the regulation of the trade.

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<sup>52</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07090/9, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Orders of Court 1711-1740', 14 December 1738.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Homer, "The Pewterer's Company's Country Searches," 107.

<sup>56</sup> Forbes, "Search, Immigration and the Goldsmiths' Company," 97.

<sup>57</sup> Forbes, *Hallmark*, 119.

### 2.3 Petitions

Despite some resistance and vocal opposition to guild regulation, producers and the public also petitioned the guilds and state for greater regulation.<sup>58</sup> In fact, it was often those producers who protested against the restriction of the guilds, who also petitioned for more regulation.<sup>59</sup> The London producers wanted national regulation, but the regional producers wanted regional regulation. This suggests that the enforcement of regulations was not always imposed from the guilds and state to a resistant population of producers, but instead, producers saw the guilds as a means through which quality could be better controlled across the trade. The guilds also recognised their own regulatory limitations and became increasingly skilled at petitioning and parliamentary lobbying in order to influence statutory support. Guild members regularly attended Parliament, such as a committee of pewterers who were obliged to attend the house of commons every Tuesday and Thursday'.<sup>60</sup> Petitioning throughout history often reflects the wider relationship between the state, the guilds, and the public.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, petitions could be used to flexibly react to different political, social and economic circumstances.

Petitioning was a collective and collaborative process, either between members of the guilds, groups of producers, or the wider public. It allowed these groups to come

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<sup>58</sup> Andreas Wurgler, "Voices from Among the Silent Masses: Humble Petitions and Social Conflicts in Early Modern Central Europe," *International Review of Social History* 46/9 (2001): 11-34.

<sup>59</sup> Minard, "Micro-Economics and Social Construction of the Market," 151.

<sup>60</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Index to the Orders of Court 1691-1740', 20 March 1699, f. 35.

<sup>61</sup> Lex Heerma Van Voss, "Introduction," *International Review of Social History* 46/9 (2001): 1-10.

together to try and influence the regulation of the trade, not least to enforce particular standards of quality. However, petitioning was expensive and time consuming. It was not always a viable option, especially because petitions were often needed at times of economic struggle to try and revive the trade. This often added to the collective nature of petitions, as by gaining wider support for a petition, there might be greater a contribution to its cost. The guilds often wrote to their members when they needed funds for a petition, for example in 1696 when a letter was sent to all members of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, asking for ‘their contribution towards the expence’ of a petition for the enforcement of sealed measures.<sup>62</sup>

Petitioners went to great lengths to get the input of a wide range of individuals, including producers within the guilds, but also lawyers and influential members of the political or social elite. The guilds had the final decision, which was made by a committee of ‘masters & wardens & such of the assistants or other members of the company as they think fit be a committee to draft & approve of the Bill’.<sup>63</sup> Copies of petitions were circulated amongst different groups of people, and received lengthy notes and annotations at each stage. In evidence given for the petition for a new Assay Office in Birmingham, Mr Alchorn the assayer to the master of the mint was asked whether he had ‘made marginal notes in some of the reports & given them to our friends - that they may expose the independence of the Goldsmiths Company in pretending to have proper checks as this office’.<sup>64</sup> The Assay Office petition also

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<sup>62</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Index to the Orders of Court 1691-1740’, 18 June 1696, f. 31.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 23 March 1698, f. 31.

<sup>64</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/40, ‘Letter Samuel Garbett to Matthew Boulton’, 8 May 1773. For an expanded discussion of the petition for new Assay Offices in

obtained separate interviews from officers at the Chester, Exeter, Newcastle and London Assay Offices. The Sheffield petition was said by Mr Gilbert Dixon, clerk to the Cutlers Company, to have been signed by ‘468 persons employed in that town’, including ‘workers in silver, their partners or refiners, both in the plated & solid silver way’.<sup>65</sup> Petitions therefore brought together groups of producers with similar interests.

Petitioners also sought the advice of influential politicians. In 1726, an application by the Worshipful Company of Pewterers was made ‘to severall proper officers of his Royall highness George Prince of Wales touching the abuses in the adulteration of Tin’.<sup>66</sup> They wrote asking ‘for the discovery and punishment of the persons concern’d in making abuses in the Tin’, and received a positive response ‘promising enquiry into the same’.<sup>67</sup> This was one way to control the quality of goods in a competitive marketplace. The trade often suffered when cheaper goods were produced or imported which were of lower quality. Therefore, producers called for the guilds or state to enforce the required standards of quality of a product’s materials and workmanship. The Worshipful Company of Needlemakers, for example, complained that ‘great quantities of Foreign needles [are] dayly imported into this kingdome... the great-est part whereof are falsly and deceitfully wrought & made of Iron-wyre,

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Birmingham and Sheffield, see chapter 5. See also, Jennifer Tann, *Birmingham Assay Office, 1773-1993* (Birmingham: Francis Lomas Ltd., 1993), especially chapter 1.

<sup>65</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/12, ‘Copy Report on Sheffield and Birmingham Assay Office Petitions’, f. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07090/9, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Orders of Court 1711-1740’, 6 September 1726.

<sup>67</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Index to the Orders of Court 1691-1740’, September 1726, f. 14.

altogether unfitt for that service'.<sup>68</sup> They called for 'effectuall remedy... to prevent the importation', because the English producers could not compete, 'being obliged by their Charter to make all their needles of steel, which costs them more without the workmanship that the Imported needles made of Iron are sold for'.<sup>69</sup> In particular, they sought to obtain an Act of Parliament and the power to seize and deface foreign needles made of Iron.<sup>70</sup> This emphasises that the guilds needed additional statutory support at times of crisis to enforce standards of quality across the metalware trade.

The guilds did not always know the best way to proceed, and debated what regulatory changes could be made to improve the trade and the quality of metalware. When faced with the problem of a struggling domestic trade in the face of lower quality foreign competition, the guilds disputed whether to petition for an increase or removal of duties, and whether to target the movement of the raw material or finished product. In 1698, 'Mr Cleece moved to apply to take off the duty on pewter, rather than to advance the duty on tinn'.<sup>71</sup> In contrast, in 1755, frustrated producers instead decided to petition for an additional duty of seven shillings per hundred weight of tin exported to prevent frauds, and attempt to prevent the exportation of tin.<sup>72</sup> A similar debate occurred within the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths when they decided to oppose a duty in 1715. Their petition argued that by enforcing a duty, and making producers get their goods marked with a duty mark, 'they will lose the benefit of fairs

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<sup>68</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 02820, Worshipful Company of Needlemakers, 'Extracts from Ordinances 1688-1875', f. 36.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, f. 37.

<sup>71</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Index to the Orders of Court 1691-1740', 25 November 1698, f. 31.

<sup>72</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 22218, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'List of the Subscribers Towards the Cost of a Parliamentary Bill for the Introduction of an Additional Duty', 1755.

and sales' because of the delay and the risk to their plate, which 'by lying some hours exposed in an open shop, will be liable to be stolen or imbezell'd'.<sup>73</sup> However, petitioning Parliament had the potential for great benefit to the trade and a more effective enforcement of quality. In a note attached to a report into the Assay Offices in 1773, it was reported that:

Since the duty of six pence per ounce of silver plate, payable by the makers thereof, was taken off, and the counterfeiting the hall marks was made a capital crime by Stat 31. Geo II. Cap. 32., the frauds in wrought plate have greatly decreased, except in such wares as are not obliged to be marked with the company's marks.<sup>74</sup>

Therefore, the guilds did not always have consistent policies or regulations, but could adapt to respond to particular problems and concerns. The regulation of the metalware trade was not just imposed by the guilds and state, but was often a complex negotiation based on the interests and opinions of the guilds, the state and groups of producers. Although the expansion of the trade reduced their effectiveness and ability to undertake searches, the guilds adapted and became skilled at petitioning, through which they could increase their authority, and influence the regulation of the trade.

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<sup>73</sup> *The Case of the Working Goldsmiths, in Relation to a Bill now Depending in the Honourable House of Commons, for Reducing the Standard of Wrought* (London, 1720).

<sup>74</sup> Parliamentary Papers Online, *Report from the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Manner of Conducting the Several Assay Offices in London, York, Exeter, Bristol, Chester, Norwich and Newcastle upon Tyne*, 1773, 70.



## 2.4 Circulation of Knowledge of Regulation

The guilds also adapted in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in response to the expansion of the trade, by increasingly utilising a wider network of producers and consumers in an attempt to maintain their authority and effectively regulate the trade. Traditionally, the public were excluded from the ‘mystery’ of the guilds, who kept their internal workings, techniques and technology private.<sup>75</sup> However, the guilds began to directly appeal to the public to report substandard metalware, which attempted to solve the increasing difficulties they faced in undertaking searches. The guilds also provided the public with new knowledge to understand the regulations of the trade and assess the quality of metalware, through newspaper advertisements and other publications.<sup>76</sup> As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, this shift has been seen by historians as part of a broader decline in the guilds’ authority. This analysis of the metalware guilds challenges this view, and argues that the ‘decline’ should more accurately be thought of as the flexibility of the guilds, and their ability to adapt in order to enforce their regulations and maintain their standard of quality across the trade.

The guilds had always used the public sphere to display their authority. In particular, many of the punishments imposed by the guilds were enacted in public.<sup>77</sup> Badly made or substandard metalware was damaged and defaced in public, and public notices were produced when substandard metalware was found on the guilds’

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<sup>75</sup> Bettoni, “Usefulness, Ornamental Function and Novelty,” 171-207.

<sup>76</sup> Janelle Day Jenstad, “Public Glory, Private Gilt: The Goldsmiths’ Company and the Spectacle of Punishment,” in *Institutional Culture in Early Modern Society*, ed. Anne Goldgar and Robert I. Frost (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 201.

<sup>77</sup> Berlin, ““Broken all in Pieces’,” 80; and Forbes, *Hallmark*, 114.

searches. For example, in reference to the poor-quality pewter seized and broken in Cornwall, the metal was to ‘be sent for to London & that information in the exchange be exhibited against [the] said goods’.<sup>78</sup> The public display of the guilds was part of a wider ceremonial enforcement of regulations in everyday society and popular culture. For instance, the guilds’ perambulations were arranged to coincide with fairs and markets.<sup>79</sup> Searches and processions were often theatrical: during searches, officers of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths often wore their livery and marched in procession along Goldsmith’s Row in Cheapside.<sup>80</sup>

There had also always been a certain degree of knowledge sharing in the guild system, both between producers and with the wider public.<sup>81</sup> Changes in the regulation of the trade had to be communicated to the wider population of producers. These were conveyed in different ways, for example, a table was produced for the members of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers to communicate the new weights of pewter.<sup>82</sup> This was produced by a committee appointed to regulate the assay of weights and metal of particular pewter wares or utensils, was read aloud in the court of assistants, and was circulated amongst the producers for their ‘approbation and confirmation’.<sup>83</sup> Royal proclamations were similarly read aloud.<sup>84</sup> Public displays of this sort could act as an

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<sup>78</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Index to the Orders of Court 1711-1740’, 11 May 1693, f. 26.

<sup>79</sup> Berlin, ““Broken all in Pieces’,” 79.

<sup>80</sup> Jenstad, “Public Glory, Private Gilt,” 209.

<sup>81</sup> S.R. Epstein and Maarten Prak, “Introduction: Guilds, Innovation, and the European Economy, 1400-1800,” in *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy, 1400-1800*, ed. S.R. Epstein and Maarten Prak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 14.

<sup>82</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07104/26, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Rough Court Minutes 1768-1771’, 15 December 1768.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Jenstad, “Public Glory, Private Gilt,” 209.

effective means of communication, and the public enforcement of the guilds' regulations acted as a deterrence and a display of their authority.

The guilds increasingly used print to communicate from the late-seventeenth century, and produced a series of newspapers and publications aimed at producers, retailers and consumers. Newspaper articles attempted to maintain the guilds' authority by reassuring the public that the guilds were effectively regulating the trade. The *London Gazette* in 1770 advertised that 'the company of Goldsmiths in London are intitled to divers privileges for the searching, assaying, supervising, marking and regulating wrought plate'.<sup>85</sup> The advertisement detailed how:

For the good and safety of the public... [The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths] have lately prosecuted and convicted divers persons for frauds in the said trade: therefore they have directed public notice to be given, that they are resolved to prosecute every person that shall be detected in making or selling any Gold or Silver wares less in fineness than the respective standards by law appointed.<sup>86</sup>

The article then proceeded to list 'extracts from acts of parliament for preventing frauds... printed for the information of the public'. This included the description of the marks on silver, the authority of the guild, and the punishments that could be enforced, which for felony was death. It noted at the end that 'any person may have a printed copy of the above extracts at the Goldsmith's Company Assay Office, in Foster-Lane,

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<sup>85</sup> Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, G.II.I.4., 'Notices from the London Gazette', 1768-73; and *The London Gazette*, Issue 11061 (21 July 1770).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

London'.<sup>87</sup> The article therefore puts forward a clear message, which emphasised the authority of the guilds. Not only did this inform the public of the severity of the frauds, perhaps to encourage them to be observant and to report any substandard metalware, but it also acted as a stark warning to any producer who might have read the newspaper.

Advertisements were also used to warn the public about deceptive practices.<sup>88</sup> In 1726 it was 'ordered that the abuse in the adulteration of tin [was] to be advertised in the Gazette'.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, an advertisement in the *London Gazette* in 1723 publicised 'the fraudulent practices of pewterers of Bristol and other places striking London upon there wares though made in the country'.<sup>90</sup> The guild was made aware of this because they were sent an anonymous letter, 'giving information of guinea basons made at Bristol of essay law wch are sold at 7 1/2s per lb to the common prejudice of the pewterers trade', requesting that the guilds undertake a search in the area.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, this emphasises the importance of knowledge sharing, and the way in which the guilds, networks of regional producers, and the public, could use each other to more effectively regulate the trade.

Advertisements were therefore a way in which the guilds could maintain their influence and enforce their regulations, despite the increasing difficulty in undertaking searches, by relying upon informants, observant retailers and producers, and the

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 31 October 1767.

<sup>89</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Index to the Orders of Court 1691-1740', 4 August 1726, f. 14.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 19 March 1723, f. 11.

<sup>91</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07090/9, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Orders of Court 1711-1740', 17 July 1722.

knowing consumer. They provided the public with the knowledge and ability to report substandard metalware, based upon their own regulations. An advertisement in *The London Gazette* in 1682 (Figure 2.2) informed the public of changes to the regulations of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, and discussed the assay marks that gold and silver goods should display. The guild requested that customers ‘are desired to send the said plate and works [those which did not display hallmarks], with the name of the Seller, to Goldsmiths-Hall’ to ensure that it was of the legal standard. In this case, the guilds maintained their authority and their role as the mediators of quality, even though they needed the public’s support in order to do so.

**A**T a Court of Assistants, held at Goldsmiths-Hall, on the 22 day of September, 1682. It was ordered that all persons that shall hereafter buy any Plate, Silver-Hilts, Buckles for Belts, or any other Wares made of Gold or Silver, that have not been Assayed at Goldsmiths-Hall, and there approved for Standard, by having struck thereon the Lyon and Leopards Head, Crowned, or one of them, ( if the said Works will conveniently bear the same, but if not, the Makers Mark, ) are desired to send the said Plate and Works, with the Name of the Seller, to Goldsmiths-Hall, where it shall not only be assayed gratis, but if found worse than Standard, both the Seller and Worker shall be Prosecuted according to Law. The Clerk of the said Company will be ready to give all persons Receipts for the said Plate they shall send into the Hall.

It was likewise ordered at a Court of Assistants, held at Goldsmiths-Hall on the 21 of October, 1682. That all persons that bought any Wares made of Gold or silver, at Tunbridge, being worse than Standard, are desired to send the said Wares, and the Name of the Seller to Goldsmiths-Hall, in order to the Prosecution of the Seller.

**Figure 2.2: The *London Gazette*, Issue 1768 (26 October 1682), 2.**

Similar notices were regularly reissued, for example in 1784 when the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths warned again that ‘several persons have for some time past practiced making up and vending silver buckles, watch cases, sword hilts, and sundry other articles of small silver work, and have not got the same assayed and

hallmarked, according to law'.<sup>92</sup> Rather than requesting the customer to send the gold or silver to Goldsmith's Hall, they simply warned that 'there is reason to apprehend [unmarked silver goods] are made up of course silver, to the great injury and disappointment of the purchasers' and that 'we do, therefore, think it our duty to give this public caution, to prevent such frauds for the future'.<sup>93</sup> Again, the article added information about the regulatory marks that should be seen on objects, stating that 'N.B The English sterling mark is a Lyon; the Irish sterling mark is an Harp, crowned'.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, the guilds increasingly strove to inform the public about their regulations and the legal standards of quality.

There were also larger publications that gave the public more detailed information about the regulations of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths. A *Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares* was first published by William Badcock in 1677 as 'A Manual for Goldsmiths, and All other Persons, whether Buyers, Sellers or Wearers of any manner of GOLDSMITHS Work' (Figure 2.3).<sup>95</sup> Although Badcock's publication was not necessarily the first for the consumer - Richard Martin and Hannibal Gamon's *Goldsmiths Storehouse* of 1604 implicitly targeted the consumer - it was the most direct and the most comprehensive.<sup>96</sup> Badcock was himself a goldsmith, and so was experienced in the trade. In a note at the beginning of the book, he gave the book extra authority by claiming that 'he hath taken the judgement and

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<sup>92</sup> *Dublin Evening Post*, 24 February 1784.

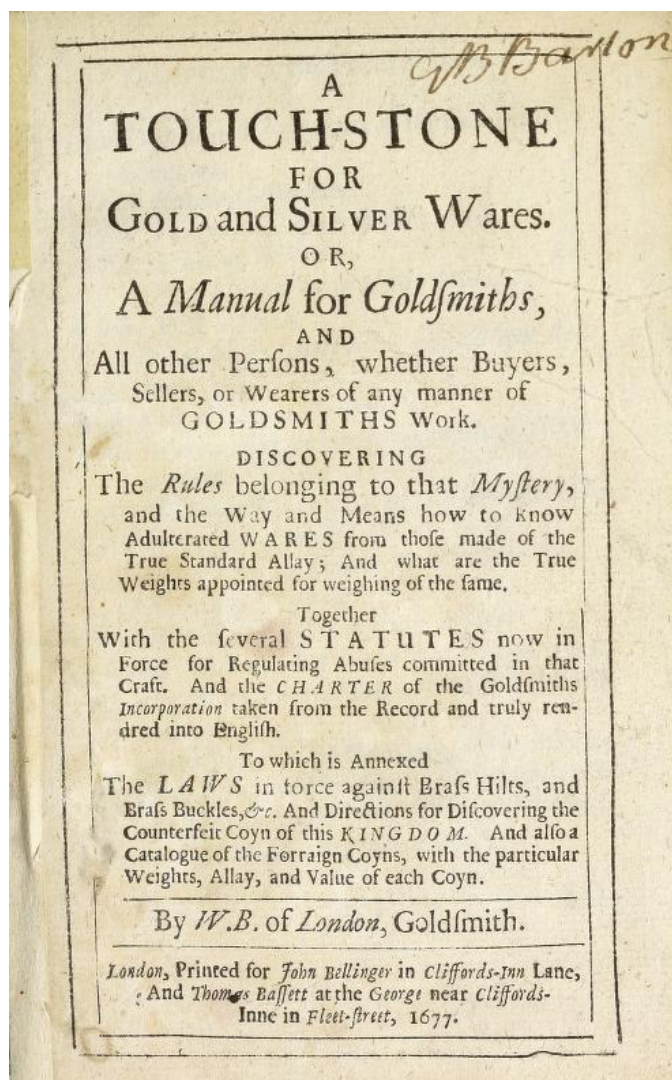
<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> William Badcock, *A Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares* (London: Printed for John Bellinger and Thomas Bassett, 1677).

<sup>96</sup> Jenstad, "Public Glory, Private Gilt," 201.

resolution of council learned in the law'.<sup>97</sup> The *Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares* was divided into three sections: a summary of the natural composition and legal standards of metalware, an outline of the statutes and laws regulating the trade, and more detail about how to detect substandard metalware, all of which he described as for 'the Publick good'.<sup>98</sup>

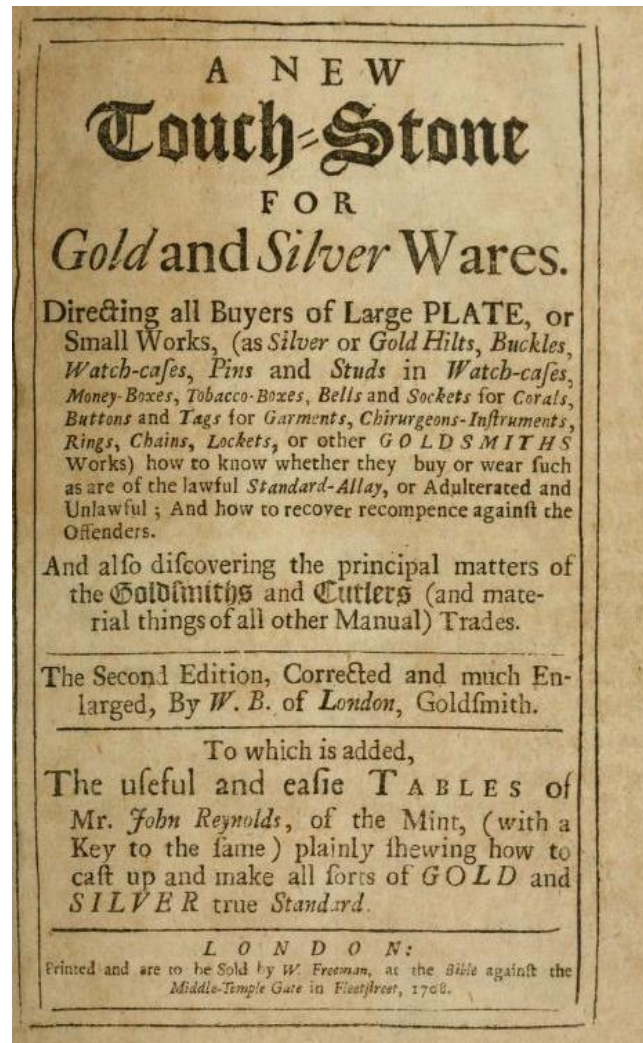


**Figure 2.3: William Badcock, *A Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares* (London: Printed for John Bellinger and Thomas Bassett, 1677).**

<sup>97</sup> Badcock, *A Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares*, A3.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

The second edition of Badcock's text, *A New Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares*, was expanded and revised from 1679, and placed an even greater emphasis upon its role as a guide for the consumer (Figure 2.4).



**Figure 2.4: William Badcock, *A New Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares* (London: Printed and Sold by W. Freeman, 1708).**

Its title page (Figure 2.4), abandoned its role as a ‘Manual for Goldsmiths’ (Figure 2.3) and was instead solely aimed at ‘all buyer of large plate, or small works’. It aimed to instruct the consumer ‘how to know whether they buy or wear such as are of the



lawful standard-allay, or adulterated and unlawful'.<sup>99</sup> Like the first edition, the publication went into great detail describing the regulation of the trade, the marks on objects, and the assay process. This revised edition also contained a series of 'useful and easie tables of Mr John Reynolds of the Mint (with a key to the same) plainly shewing how to cast up and make all sorts of Gold and Silver true standard'.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, it added information about the regulation of the cutlers' trade.

The guilds not only relied increasingly on the consumer to report substandard ware, but the public were also called upon to prosecute fraudulent producers. In contrast to the guilds' requests in the seventeenth century to bring fraudulent goods to the guilds, they increasingly encouraged consumers to undertake the prosecutions of fraudulent producers and retailers themselves. One of the primary purposes of the *New Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares* was to inform the 'all buyers of large plate or small works... how to recover recompence against the offenders'.<sup>101</sup> Badcock did write that the consumer could also apply to the Wardens of the Goldsmiths, but emphasised that they could apply directly to the seller, or to the Magistrates in the assay towns, who are 'bound by law... to stand by the party wronged'.<sup>102</sup> This highlights the shift in the prosecution of substandard ware, from it being the responsibility of the guilds to the responsibility and benefit of the consumer. Although the guilds had to adapt in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they maintained their authority by communicating their regulations and standards of quality to the public through print.

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<sup>99</sup> William Badcock, *A New Touch-stone for Gold and Silver Wares* (London: Printed and Sold by W. Freeman, 1708), title page.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, title page.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 142.

The shift of quality control onto the consumer can be seen as a risk. When information was shared with the consumer, more power was placed on them to judge what constituted quality metalware, and so they might choose to reject the guilds' standards of quality.<sup>103</sup> However, within the silver trade, there were state-enforced legal standards of quality, and therefore it was in the interest of the consumer to adhere to them. Nevertheless, the increasing involvement of the consumer did have some implications for the wider perception of product quality. Barbara Bettoni, in her study of eighteenth-century Italy, shows how a similar proliferation of new luxuries and 'toys', challenged the traditional definition of quality and caused a shift from intrinsic value to aesthetic value.<sup>104</sup> This shift also occurred in the English metalware trade, but because of the flexibility of the guild system and their circulation of information about the regulation of the trade, intrinsic value still remained of importance to consumers. Despite these changes, because they adapted, the guilds and state were able to continue to participate in debates about quality, and provide the consumer with a clear understanding of the specific standards of quality that had long been enforced by the guilds.

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<sup>103</sup> Michel Callon, Cécile Méadel and Vololona Rabearisoa, "The Economy of Qualities," *Economy and Society* 31/2 (2002), 206; and Robert J Foster, "The Work of the New Economy: Consumers, Brands, and Value Creation," *Cultural Anthropology* 22/4 (2007), 714.

<sup>104</sup> Bettoni, "Usefulness, Ornamental Function and Novelty," 171-207.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted three main areas in which the guilds adapted in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Firstly, the guilds were flexible institutions that were able to re-issue or re-examine their regulations and ordinances at moments of political, economic or social change. This allowed them to respond to the informal regulations, customs and everyday practices that evolved with the expansion of the trade. Secondly, the guilds adapted by responding to petitions from their members, producers and the wider public. They themselves also petitioned the state for statutory support to influence the state regulation of the trade or improve the trade in times of difficulty. Finally, and most importantly, the guilds reached out to the consumer and the wider public. By sharing knowledge about the regulation of the trade and encouraging a greater understanding of quality and how to detect substandard metalware, the guilds found new ways to enforce their regulations and maintain their standards of quality. This succeeded in easing the difficulties faced by the guilds when undertaking regional searches in light of the expansion of the trade and the changing attitude to the guilds' right to search private property. Regulation was not only a top-down institutional imposition, but relied on the public knowledge of regulation, public support and informants, and belief in their use and authority. By considering the flexibility of the guilds, and the communication between regulator, producer and consumer, this chapter had challenged the view that there was a complete decline in the guilds in the eighteenth century. The main aim of the guilds was to regulate quality and prevent fraud and substandard metalware and the guilds adapted to best fulfil these aims, even if it meant forsaking some of their potential privileges.

## Chapter 3.

### A New Taxonomy of Goods: The Expansion and Diversification of the Metalware Trade

In the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, consumers had a greater desire and ability to spend, and producers responded by providing a wider range of innovative products, designs and materials than had previously been seen.<sup>1</sup> ‘New luxuries’ emerged alongside traditional luxuries, practical hardware and second-hand goods.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the ‘toy’ trade - the production of small metal goods such as buttons, buckles and watch chains - was a lucrative opportunity. Metalware production emerged outside the metropolis and soon producers in Birmingham and Sheffield came to be known for the variety and quality of their metalware. In just a few decades their metalware started to challenge the traditional dominance of the London producers.<sup>3</sup> The expansion of these regional manufacturing towns led to the renegotiation of the places that were known for their production of quality metalware,

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<sup>1</sup> John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1994); and Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Europa, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> Jan de Vries, “Luxury in the Dutch Golden Age in Theory and Practice,” in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, ed. Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 43; Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson, eds., *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); and Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme, eds., *Modernity and the Second-hand Trade* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Rita McLean, “Introduction: Matthew Boulton, 1728-1809,” in *Matthew Boulton: Selling what all the World Desires*, ed. Shena Mason (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 1-7.

and a shift in how these new goods were valued. In turn, this also influenced how quality was defined. Whilst the guilds and state attempted to regulate how quality was enforced, producers challenged this system by finding ways to innovate, inside and outside these regulatory systems. In doing so, producers developed the skills and influence with which they could better participate in the deliberation of quality.

This chapter explores the expansion of the trade and the production of metalware, and looks closely at how new people, products and places in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries changed the market for metalware. Firstly, it questions why Birmingham and Sheffield expanded their production from the late-eighteenth century and developed their reputation for the production of quality metalware. There were three key reasons for their expansion: first, a number of influential manufacturers worked to improve the trade in the regional manufacturing towns; second, they possessed the adaptable skills and knowledge to expand and diversify their range of products and materials; and finally, producers developed new technologies that made them able to produce metalware of a higher quality and at lower cost. This chapter continues by investigating how these new goods and materials created a new taxonomy of goods, which affected the hierarchy of quality metalware, in which variety and innovation in production and technology became increasingly important.

### **3.1 The Emergence of Birmingham and Sheffield**

The expansion of Birmingham and Sheffield from the late-seventeenth century paved the way for a proliferation of new producers, products and processes. Birmingham's population more than doubled in just a generation in the middle of the eighteenth

century, passing from 15,000 in 1730 to 35,000 in 1760.<sup>4</sup> It developed its status as a manufacturing centre, home to inventors and innovators who successfully competed in the national and international metalware trades. Whilst its population was still smaller than a number of other major towns, including London, Bristol, Exeter and Norwich, Birmingham's population was unusual in that it was overwhelmingly employed in the metalware trades.<sup>5</sup> According to John Taylor and Samuel Garbett, local manufacturers, out of its population of 35,000 in 1760, as many as 20,000 people worked in the toy trade.<sup>6</sup> By the late-eighteenth century, Birmingham had developed into one of the largest and most successful manufacturing towns in Europe. The reputation of Birmingham's products shifted from poor-quality 'brummagem' ware to good-quality 'Birmingham' ware.<sup>7</sup> Sheffield similarly developed a reputation for quality, particularly in the cutlery trade. Like Birmingham, its population expanded in the eighteenth century, from 3,500 in 1700 to 12,000 in 1750.<sup>8</sup> At least 468 people worked 'in the silver way in Sheffield', and became known for their quality and capacity to innovate.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Eric Hopkins, *Birmingham: The First Manufacturing Town in the World 1760-1840* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), 31.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Parliamentary Papers Online, *Journal to the House of Commons 1757-61*, 496. (20 March 1759); and Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men: The Friends who made the Future, 1730-1810* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 64.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Delieb, *The Great Silver Manufactory: Matthew Boulton and the Birmingham Silversmiths 1760-1790* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), 40; and Jennifer Tann, *Birmingham Assay Office, 1773-1993* (Birmingham: Francis Lomas Ltd, 1993), 15.

<sup>8</sup> Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance*, 27.

<sup>9</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/12, 'Committee on Petitions Relating to Assaying Plate', 18 February 1773, f. 2.

The rise of the metalware trades in Birmingham and Sheffield has long captured the interest of historical research. Both regions have been subject to local studies, which have charted their expansion and the key players involved.<sup>10</sup> This has been seen in the wider context of regional development and proto-industrialisation, in which Birmingham is said to have gone through an ‘industrial enlightenment’ from the early-eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Eighteenth-century Sheffield, and its producers, have received less attention in recent years, but have also been seen as part of a wider discussion of specialisation and quality production.<sup>12</sup> Not only has this been of interest to those who focus on business history and the development of successful manufacturing firms and marketing strategies, but also to historians of technology, who have questioned whether the technical skill and innovation of Birmingham and Sheffield producers was the reason for their rise.<sup>13</sup>

Some historians have been less positive about the success of Birmingham and Sheffield, and have suggested that regional producers were unsuccessful in their development of their metalware trades, made little profit and did not produce quality metalware. Kenneth Quickenden has argued that the silver trade in these regions was unprofitable, the partnership between Matthew Boulton and John Fothergill was

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<sup>10</sup> Historians have particularly focused upon Matthew Boulton, for example: Shena Mason, ed., *Matthew Boulton: Selling What All the World Desires* (Birmingham: Yale University Press, 2009); and Delieb, *The Great Silver Manufactory*, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Peter M. Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, Technology and Culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey Tweedale, *Steel City: Entrepreneurship, Strategy, and Technology in Sheffield 1743-1993* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, *La Pièce et le Geste: Artisans, Marchands et Savoir Technique à Londres au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2013), especially 208-216.

disorganised, and producers continued to manufacture substandard ware.<sup>14</sup> Others have pointed to the failure of Boulton's production and marketing of ormolu, a newly developed alloy that was imitative of gold.<sup>15</sup> Within a century, the metalware trades in Birmingham and Sheffield did decline when they faced changing consumer demand and the increasing preference for pottery and glass. Of the largest manufacturers in Birmingham, Boulton moved on from the silverware and toy trades in the nineteenth century to develop steam engines in partnership with James Watt, and Samuel Garbett became bankrupt in 1782. Nevertheless, producers across the region were able to develop their reputation for innovation and quality from the late-seventeenth century onwards. Moreover, this does not detract from the important questions that are raised by their expansion, the success of their integration of new materials and consumer goods into the marketplace, and their impact on the changing definition of quality.

Research has questioned why regional manufacturing towns emerged and has investigated the reasons for the clustering of producers within particular trades or specialisms.<sup>16</sup> Within the silver trade in England, there had been Assay Offices in London, Chester, York, Exeter, Norwich and Newcastle, which made them the most likely centres for the trade.<sup>17</sup> Until 1773, there were no Assay Offices in Sheffield or

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<sup>14</sup> Kenneth Quickenden, "Boulton and Fothergill Silver," Unpublished PhD Thesis, Westfield College, 1990; and Kenneth Quickenden, "Boulton and Fothergill Silver: Business Plans and Miscalculations," *Art History* 5/3 (1980): 274-296.

<sup>15</sup> Nicholas Goodison, "Ormolu Ornaments," in *Matthew Boulton: Selling What All the World Desires*, ed. Shena Mason (Birmingham: Yale University Press, 2009), 55-63.

<sup>16</sup> Pat Hudson, ed., *Regions and Industries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and John F. Wilson and Andrew Popp, eds., *Industrial Clusters and Regional Business Networks in England, 1750-1970* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> See chapter 1 of this thesis; and Parliamentary Papers Online, *Report from the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Manner of Conducting the Several Assay Offices in London, York, Exeter, Bristol, Chester, Norwich and Newcastle upon Tyne, 1773*, 8.



Birmingham, which therefore leads us to question why they emerged as important manufacturing towns. On the whole, regional clusters of producers can be seen to have two main causes. Firstly, geographic factors, such as the proximity to mines, rivers or transport networks, were crucial for the success of the production processes that required them and so attracted clusters of producers within a trade. However, increasingly from the seventeenth century, the natural landscape was being adapted to benefit manufacturing districts, for example with the construction of canals, waterways, and other improvement projects, which improved transport links and fuelled water-wheels.<sup>18</sup> However, proximity to water power was more important in the textile than in the metalware trades. In Matthew Boulton's Soho Manufactory near Birmingham, a mill pool was constructed to ensure a reservoir of water during the summer months, but because of the expense, producers often relied on turning rollers by hand in the production of metal goods rather than using water-power.<sup>19</sup>

The second, and more important, reason for clustering, was the social and economic advantages of co-operation with other producers.<sup>20</sup> Typically, co-operation between producers was enforced through the regulation of the trade by the guilds.<sup>21</sup> Historians often credit the success of Birmingham to the fact that its activities were carried out outside guild control, which some historians believe stifled innovation.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*, 25.

<sup>19</sup> Quickenden, "Boulton and Fothergill Silver," 105.

<sup>20</sup> Lucy Newton, "Capital Networks in the Sheffield Region, 1850-1885," in *Industrial Clusters and Regional Business Networks in England, 1750-1970*, ed. John F. Wilson and Andrew Popp (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 130.

<sup>21</sup> See chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>22</sup> Pat Hudson, "Industrial Organization and Structure," in *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain. Volume 1: Industrialisation, 1700-1860*, ed. Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 32; and Marie B. Rowlands,

Neither town was a corporate town and remained mostly out of reach of the regulation and search capacity of the London guilds.<sup>23</sup> However, neither Birmingham or Sheffield existed completely outside formal and informal regulation and quality control, especially those who worked with silver. Moreover, co-operation between producers could be mutually beneficial, both inside and outside guild control. Francesca Carnevali rightly argued that a producer's propensity towards co-operation was the result of a business decision, and not something that was expected.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, producers with similar interests often chose to group together socially, economically and geographically, both within institutions such as the guilds and less formal networks. They shared skills, resources, and expertise. This contributed to the expansion of the trade, and the introduction of new people, products and processes.

The expanding market for metalware instigated a thriving export trade. The success of the regional manufacturing towns, and their reputation for quality and innovation, ensured their ability to compete internationally. A significant proportion of Birmingham and Sheffield metalware was exported. For instance, the annual value of the toy trade in Birmingham was £600,000, 5/6 of which was exported.<sup>25</sup> By 1786, the hardware export trade was valued at £1.5 million by Samuel Garbett.<sup>26</sup> Producers in Birmingham and Sheffield were especially successful in their export trade, and toys

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*Masters and Men in the West Midland Metalware Trades before the Industrial Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), 96.

<sup>23</sup> As explored in chapters 1 and 2.

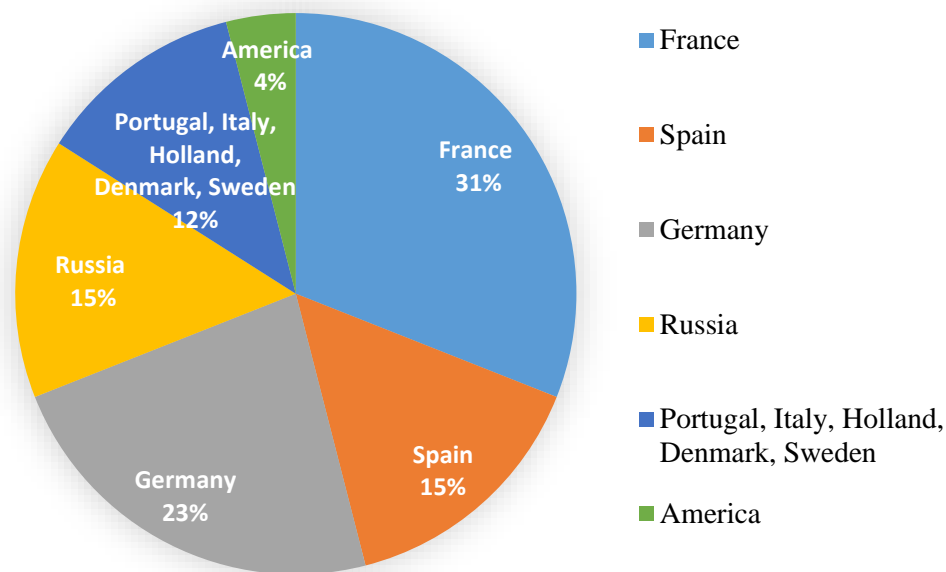
<sup>24</sup> Francesca Carnevali, "Crooks, Thieves, and Receivers: Transaction Costs in Nineteenth-Century Industrial Birmingham," *Economic History Review* 57/3 (2004): 533-550.

<sup>25</sup> Uglow, *The Lunar Men*, 64.

<sup>26</sup> British Library, Add MS 34462, Auckland Papers, Vol. LI., 'Evidence for a Commercial Treaty with France', 1786, ff. 128-129.

to the value of £100,000 were exported annually.<sup>27</sup> In particular, it was the thriving buckle and toy trades that were successfully exported, as producers ‘have little export to Europe in the coarser goods but in the finer it has increased to all parts of Europe’.<sup>28</sup> As shown by Figure 3.1, the greatest proportion of hardware was exported to France by 1786.<sup>29</sup>

**Figure 3.1: Chart Showing the Proportion of Hardware Goods that were Exported to Different Countries from Britain in 1786.**



Source: Data taken from the testimony of Samuel Garbett. British Library, Add MS 34462, Auckland Papers, Vol. LI., Evidence for a commercial treaty with France, 1786, 128-129.

Significant amounts of metalware were also exported to Germany, Spain and Russia (Figure 3.1). Therefore, the stakes were high for producers and there was a great

<sup>27</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/10, ‘Considerations upon the Petition of the Workers in Silver in the Towns of Birmingham & Sheffield for an Assayer to be Established in those Places’, f. 3.

<sup>28</sup> British Library, Add MS 34462, Auckland Papers, Vol. LI., ‘Evidence for a Commercial Treaty with France’, 1786, ff. 133-134.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, ff. 128-129.

potential to benefit from the expanding market for metalware, nationally and internationally. Especially in the expanding regional manufacturing towns of Birmingham and Sheffield, producers were at the forefront of the metalware trade, and pushed the boundaries of the size of the trade, and the variety, quantity and quality of the metalware that could be produced.

### **3.2 Producers and Manufacturers**

The expansion of the metalware trades from the seventeenth century resulted in an increasing number of producers. Firms of different size and types of production were part of the metalware trades, ranging from those who worked independently, to those who managed networks of subcontracted workers, small workshops of producers, or larger manufactories that employed hundreds of people.<sup>30</sup> Many producers had workshops and shop spaces that were connected to their living space, but as the trade expanded in the eighteenth century the most successful manufacturers, such as Matthew Boulton, opened showrooms and employed agents to retail their goods. Whilst similar systems of workshops and manufactories existed across different trades, for example the numerous workshops of shoemakers, coopers and tanners, and ceramics manufactories and showrooms, the diversity of production and retail spaces was particularly prominent within the metalware trade.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Sheilagh Ogilvie, "The European Economy in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. T.C.W Blanning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 119.

<sup>31</sup> Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures 1700-1820: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1994), especially 262; and Maxine Berg, "Small Producer Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century England," *Business History* 35/1 (1993): 17-39.

The expansion of the trade, and the increasing number of producers meant that there was increased competition. Although regional clusters of producers co-operated, shared tools and workers, there was competition within each region. More importantly, there was competition between regions. The Birmingham and Sheffield producers, in particular, were keen to challenge the traditional dominance of London. In doing so, they sought to prove to national and international consumers that they had the skills and expertise to produce desirable, quality metalware. Boulton recognised that Birmingham had once held the reputation for the production of poor-quality ‘Brummagem ware’, and aimed to reverse this reputation and successfully compete with the London producers.<sup>32</sup> Because of this sense of competition, entrepreneurs and ‘gentleman manufacturers’ strove to differentiate themselves in an increasingly crowded market by innovating and developing new technology, products and materials.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, it was a number of key individuals in Birmingham and Sheffield who influenced the expansion of the trade. There were three manufacturers who had large workshops in Birmingham: John Taylor, who employed 500 people by 1755 in his button and toy manufactory; John Baskerville, who by 1745 employed 300 workers in his japanning trade; and Matthew Boulton, who inherited the toy trade from his father, Matthew Boulton senior, on his death in 1759, and expanded the trade, eventually employing a large number of people at his Soho Manufactory, especially during his partnership with John Fothergill.<sup>34</sup> Five producers from Birmingham

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<sup>32</sup> Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 166; and Delieb, *The Great Silver Manufactory*, 40. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

<sup>33</sup> Rowlands, *Masters and Men*, 154.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 155.

entered their marks at Goldsmiths' Hall in London: Gimblett and Vale, Thomas Green, Mark Homer, John Smith and James Wright.<sup>35</sup> So too did five producers in Sheffield: Fenton and Creswick, William Hancock, John Robotham, Henry Tudor and John Winter.<sup>36</sup> In total, they 'wrought up near 1000 ounces per month in solid' silver.<sup>37</sup> There were hundreds of other producers who worked in the regional manufacturing towns on a smaller scale, and there were those who undertook work in their own homes. Larger manufacturers were reliant upon this workshop economy for their flexible organisation of production, as it meant they could have access to a large number of workers and subcontract specific tasks when they were needed.<sup>38</sup> However, it was the larger manufacturers and key individuals who dominated the market in the regional manufacturing towns.<sup>39</sup> They mobilised the regional producers, encouraged a high standard of production, and supported innovation.

The Birmingham and Sheffield producers were known for diversifying their skills and working with a variety of materials. Few producers in the regional manufacturing towns worked with one type of metal alone, and produced goods in a variety of materials, including metalware, but also precious stones, glass and textiles. There was not one producer in Sheffield 'that carrys on the business of a Silversmith

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<sup>35</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/15, 'Committee of Sheffield Assay Petitioners', 26 February 1773, f. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/12, 'Committee on Petitions Relating to Assaying Plate', 18 February 1773, f. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, f. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Berg, "Small Producer Capitalism," 25. The flexible organisation of production in the regional manufacturing towns will be explored further in chapter 4 of this thesis.

<sup>39</sup> Maxine Berg, "Commerce and Creativity in Eighteenth-Century Birmingham," in *Markets and Manufacture in Early Industrial Europe*, ed. Maxine Berg (London: Routledge, 1991), 184.

only'.<sup>40</sup> Instead, 'these are people who have been brought up to other trades who now follow the business of plate workers and silversmiths'.<sup>41</sup> For example, Garbett was described as a 'refiner of Gold and Silver a considerable manufacturer of iron ordinance & has a fine chymical work'.<sup>42</sup> This reputation spread into popular culture, for example in the popular ballad 'Birmingham Jack of all Trades'. It was sung:

To Birmingham I did set out,  
To seek a situation,  
I'd often heard folks say it was  
The toyshop of the nation.  
I'm a roving jack of all trades  
Of every trade and all trades  
And if you want to know my name  
They call me Jack of all trades...<sup>43</sup>

The ballad continued to list numerous trades, both in the metalware trade but also with other products and services, such as a pastry cook, coffin maker and porter. In this case, it clearly refers to an individual worker, who circulated between different places of work and possessed a range of different skills.

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<sup>40</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/14, 'Minutes on the Sheffield Assay Petition', 24 February 1773, f. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/12, 'Copy Report on Sheffield and Birmingham Assay Office Petitions', f. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/13, 'Committee on the Sheffield Assay Petitions', 19 February 1773, f. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Recording of the ballad Birmingham Jack of All Trades, Birmingham Museums, <https://soundcloud.com/birminghammuseums/birmingham-jack-of-all-trades>

This varied experience gave the regional producers an advantage compared to some of their competitors, including producers in London. Birmingham and Sheffield producers argued that London producers did not have the skills to develop, or excel at, these new products. This was ‘because they neither have such tools, and if they had they could not use them to proper advantage for want of experience which is acquired by making immense quantities of toys in Bath metal, white metal, pinchbeck metal, steel, &c.’.<sup>44</sup> In opposition, the London goldsmiths argued that it resulted in a lack of expertise because producers had not focused upon a single trade for the duration of the lifetime. Nevertheless, it meant that many of the new producers and successful entrepreneurs and manufacturers had the transferable skills to produce an increasing variety of goods in different materials and designs.

### **3.3 New Products and Materials**

As the market for metalware expanded, producers responded by developing a range of new products, designs and materials. Producers in Birmingham and Sheffield had a long history of working with metalware prior to the seventeenth century, including steel, brass and copper, which gave them a competitive advantage.<sup>45</sup> The diverse tools, skills and expertise the regional producers had developed over time contributed to the production of a range of new products and materials. By the eighteenth century,

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<sup>44</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/10, ‘Considerations upon the Petition of the Workers in Silver in the Towns of Birmingham & Sheffield for an Assayer to be Established in those Places’, f. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Henry Hamilton, *The English Brass and Copper Industries to 1800* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1967), 127.



producers worked with iron, copper, brass, zinc, gold and silver.<sup>46</sup> The regional trades developed their reputation for the production of ‘toys’ that targeted a new consumer and expanded the market for metalware to include new products. Such ‘toys’ included a range of small items of metalware, including buttons, buckles and watch chains, in a variety of materials, such as silver, brass and copper. It was precisely this choice that appealed to the consumer. The metalware trades thrived, and alongside the producers in the traditional silverware and cutlery trades, there were successful innovations, for example pinchbeck, Sheffield plate and Britannia metal. These new goods and materials influenced consumer demand and the wider understanding of quality; novelty and variety became increasingly important.<sup>47</sup>

The range of different types of metalware, from pricey decorative items in silver, to cheaper alternatives in pewter, and new imitative products in Sheffield plate, have been discussed by historians in terms of ‘old’ luxuries and ‘new’ luxuries, a classification proposed by Jan de Vries.<sup>48</sup> According to de Vries’ classification, old luxuries strove for ‘grandeur or exquisite refinement’, while new luxury goods strove ‘more for comfort and enjoyment’. However, the division between ‘old’ and ‘new’ luxuries was not as clear as de Vries suggests.<sup>49</sup> ‘New luxuries’ encompassed a wide

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<sup>46</sup> Rowlands, *Masters and Men*, 135.

<sup>47</sup> Barbara Bettoni has made a similar argument for the metalware trade in Italy, in which she shows there was the increasing importance of novelty and fashionability that superseded the intrinsic value of metal goods. Barbara Bettoni, “Usefulness, Ornamental Function and Novelty: Debates on Quality in Button and Buckle Manufacturing in Northern Italy (Eighteenth to Nineteenth Centuries),” in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture, 1500-1900*, ed. Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 171-207

<sup>48</sup> De Vries, “Luxury in the Dutch Golden Age,” 43. This classification of ‘old’ and ‘new’ luxuries will be discussed alongside the marketing of metalware in chapter 6 of this thesis.

<sup>49</sup> Bruno Blondé and Ilja Van Damme, “Fashioning Old and New or Moulding the Material Culture of Europe (Late Seventeenth-Early Nineteenth Centuries),” in *Fashioning Old and*

range of consumer goods - from highly decorative bespoke designs to increasingly standardised ready-made goods.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the boundary between luxury and necessity - between the exclusive and the popular - blurred as new technology and a flexible organisation of production allowed most types of metalware to be produced at a lower cost.<sup>51</sup>

Producers in London also produced an increasing variety of metalware, as ‘most material is carried on in London - such as plates & dishes, Tureens, Kipperns, tea kitchens, cups and covers, waiters, sauce boats and many others impossible for me to mention’, however the variety produced in Birmingham and Sheffield was unparalleled.<sup>52</sup> Regional producers developed their reputation for an even wider range of goods, in particular ‘new luxuries’ such as toys, buttons and buckles. Boulton explained that ‘we have had & have now considerable orders our plated manufactory is increased - platina & plated buttons’ and ‘steel [watch] chains’.<sup>53</sup> Joshua Steele, another Birmingham producer, similarly claimed that ‘my [platina metal] buckles are

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*New: Changing Consumer Patterns in Western Europe, 1650-1900*, ed. Bruno Blondé, et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 9.

<sup>50</sup> Cissie Fairchild, “The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods in Eighteenth Century Paris,” in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1994), 228-248; and Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, “Commerce and the Commodity: Graphic Display and Selling New Consumer Goods in 18<sup>th</sup> C England,” in *Art Markets in Europe, 1400-1800*, ed. Michael North and David Ormrod (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 187.

<sup>51</sup> Berg, “Commerce and Creativity,” 173-204.

<sup>52</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/15, ‘Committee of Sheffield Assay Petitioners’, 26 February 1773, f. 8.

<sup>53</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/1/23, Letter Book 1766-8, ‘Letter to Mr John Herman Ebbinghaus’, 28 October 1767, f. 30.

extremely admired'.<sup>54</sup> As many as 5000 workmen were responsible in Birmingham for the production of buckles.<sup>55</sup> Sheffield manufacturers similarly produced large quantities of 'candlesticks - knife shafts, bottle stands and salts' in a variety of materials and designs.<sup>56</sup> Producers in these regions had moved from specialising in particular products, to developing flexible skills that could be adapted to produce a wider variety of goods. Producers in Sheffield, who had once specialised in the Cutlers trade, moved on to work with both plated and solid silver. One producer wrote that 'thirty years ago there was not a twentieth part of what there are now, and those employed only in making knife handles; and that the increase has been both in the plated & solid silver manufactures'.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, regional producers were at the forefront of the production of an increasing variety of metalware.

Each new product could also be made in a wider range of materials. Boulton was responsible for the production of a wide variety of objects in different materials, including 'many ornamental utensils, tureens, candlesticks, vases, coffee pots...'.<sup>58</sup> His notebook dated from 1768 to 1775 lists the range of metals in which each design could be created.<sup>59</sup> A vase, for example, could be made in 'Gilt metal, Plated Metal, Laquered Metal, Boyld [or Sauced?] Metal, Aleblaster White & Vaind, Blew John, Marble,

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<sup>54</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/12/2, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1762-6, 'Letter from Joshua Steele', 29 October 1762.

<sup>55</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/13, 'Committee on the Sheffield Assay Petitions', 19 February 1773, ff. 4-5.

<sup>56</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/15, 'Committee of Sheffield Assay Petitioners', f. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/12, 'Copy Report on the Sheffield and Birmingham Assay Office Petitions', f. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/13, 'Committee on the Sheffield Assay Petitions', 19 February 1773, f. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/108/5, 'Notebook', 1768-1775.

China, Etruscan ware, Japand & Varnished, Glass Blew & other Colours, Enamild, Black Darbyshire Marble'.<sup>60</sup> As many as twenty-two different types of objects, including spoons, thimbles and table crosses could be made in Britannia metal. Multiple types of material could be used in a single object. For example, a pair of rococo candlesticks made by Boulton and Fothergill in 1773, was made in silver, but had Sheffield plate nozzles (Figure 3.2).



**Figure 3.2: Pair of Candlesticks, Silver with Sheffield Plate Nozzles, Boulton and Fothergill, 1768, Birmingham Assay Office, S1140.**

This was reflected in the different marks that appeared on each part of the object, with the Chester Assay Office mark, the lion passant, and date letter for 1768 on the solid

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, f. 1.

silver base, and ‘three crowns, with B&F between’, the mark that was used by Boulton and Fothergill on Sheffield plate prior to 1773, stamped on the nozzles.<sup>61</sup>

Many of these products and materials, or ‘populuxe’ goods, were designed as cheaper copies of elite luxury items, which appealed both to the emerging middling classes and the fashion-conscious elites.<sup>62</sup> There were a variety of new metal alloys and finishing techniques, from gilt silver, to ormolu, cut steel and stamped brassware.<sup>63</sup> Firstly, there were products that were imitative of silver. For example, Sheffield plate, which fused and rolled silver and copper into plated sheets; and Britannia metal, a pewter alloy that was also known as French pewter, white metal or hard metal.<sup>64</sup> Secondly, there were products that were imitative of gold. Notably, pinchbeck, a brass alloy developed in the early-eighteenth century by Christopher Pinchbeck; Prince’s metal, another brass alloy, that was similar to pinchbeck in composition and appearance; platina, a new method of production combining copper and silver; Bath metal; and ormolu.<sup>65</sup> Although many of these innovations were not discovered in either Birmingham or Sheffield - for example ormolu was first

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<sup>61</sup> Delieb, *The Great Silver Manufactory*, 129.

<sup>62</sup> Fairchild, “The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods,” 228-248; and Helen Clifford, “Concepts of Invention, Identity and Imitation in the London and Provincial Metal-Working Trades, 1750-1800,” *Journal of Design History* 12/3 (1999): 241-255.

<sup>63</sup> Maxine Berg, “Product Innovation in Core Consumer Industries in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” in *Technological Revolutions in Europe*, ed. Maxine Berg and Kristine Bruland (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1998), 139.

<sup>64</sup> Gordon Crosskey, *Old Sheffield Plate: A History of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Plated Trade* (Oxford: Treffry Publishing, 2011), 1; and Christopher Peal, *Pewter of Great Britain, for Pleasure and Investment* (London: John Gifford, 1983), 209-212.

<sup>65</sup> Geoffrey Wills, *Copper and Brass* (London: Country Life Books, 1968), 17; Barbara Bettoni, “Fashion, Tradition and Innovation in Button Manufacturing in Early Modern Italy,” *Technology and Culture* 55/3 (2014), 690; and Kenneth Dewhurst, “Prince Rupert as a Scientist,” *British Journal for the History of Science* 1/4 (1963), 368.

developed in France and pinchbeck was invented by a watchmaker in London (Table 3.1) - producers in Birmingham and Sheffield were instrumental in popularising them.

**Table 3.1: A Table Outlining the Important New Materials Developed Within the Metalware Trades in the Late-Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.**

<b>Metal</b>	<b>Composition</b>	<b>Origin</b>	<b>Date</b>
Britannia Metal	Pewter Alloy	Sheffield	c.1770
Ormolu	Gilt Brass or Bronze	France	Mid-18 <sup>th</sup> Century
Pinchbeck	Brass Alloy	London	Early-18 <sup>th</sup> Century
Prince's Metal	Brass Alloy	London	c.1670
Sheffield Plate	Silver and copper	Sheffield	1742

The way in which these new metals could be seen as imitative caused difficulties in their regulation. They did not sit easily in the systems of guild and state regulation.<sup>66</sup> As several historians, most notably Helen Clifford and Maxine Berg, have pointed out, plated goods were often seen as deceitful by those who regulated the trade.<sup>67</sup> This concern was raised by the London goldsmiths who feared that consumers were being deceived into buying silver plate as solid silver. Therefore, regulators of the trade, especially the guilds, were often opposed to imitative materials.<sup>68</sup> Some older imitative methods, such as gilding, had been discussed in guild regulation since their origin, where the guilds warned against the potential for their deceitfulness and

<sup>66</sup> Discussed in chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis.

<sup>67</sup> Helen Clifford, "Innovation or Emulation? Silverware and its Imitations in Britain 1750-1800," *History of Technology* 23 (2001): 59-80; and Maxine Berg, "From Imitation to Invention: Creating Commodities in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Economic History Review* 55/1 (2002): 1-30.

<sup>68</sup> Reed Benhamou, "Imitation in the Decorative Arts of the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Design History* 4/1 (1991), 9.

fraudulence.<sup>69</sup> In particular, the guilds attempted to prevent the use of imitative materials in the production of specific objects, such as ‘locks, rings, beads, candlesticks, harness for girdles, chalices, hilts, nor pomels of swords, powder boxes, nor covers for cups’.<sup>70</sup> The guilds argued that not only could they be deceitful, but they were wasteful of valuable materials, so the guilds needed to restrict their use to prevent ‘frauds and deceits, and the wasting of gold and silver’.<sup>71</sup> There was the concern that once the silver had been used in plating base metals, it would be extremely difficult to recover because few producers had the skill that was required to do so.

There was a shift in the eighteenth century, and a wider acceptance of these imitative materials. The Birmingham producers claimed that the demand was high for plated goods because they were ‘neat and more usefull’ and ‘rendered the article as much cheaper as the difference between steel and silver’.<sup>72</sup> They further argued that silver plated goods were visibly different than solid silver ‘for the cutting parts are visible and the back parts tho outwardly silver are understood by every one to be only covered or plated’.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, the consumer could not have been deceived. Regulators of the trade ensured that producers registered separate marks in the Assay Office to put on their plated goods and their solid silver (Figure 3.2); however, many

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<sup>69</sup> Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, G.II.IV.2., ‘Counsels Opinion as Two Cases Involving Fraudulent Attempts to Obtain the Co Marks on Counterfeit Articles’, 23 January 1769. (Stat. 5. Hen. 4. Cpt. 13)

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/3, ‘Case of the Wardens and Assistants of the Company or Mystery of Goldsmiths of the City of London’, 1773, f. 3.

<sup>72</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/36, ‘Letter Benjamin May to Matthew Boulton’ [Copy Letter Benjamin May to John Carter 1 May 1771], 21 April 1773, ff. 1-2.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

of the new materials still remained unregulated and outside the guild system.<sup>74</sup> Imitative metalware also served another purpose. As John Styles suggests, in order to be successful, new goods had to relate to products that were already in the marketplace.<sup>75</sup> Consumers were more likely to purchase a new product if they already possessed some knowledge about how to identify and use it. This allowed the object to be more easily positioned in the hierarchy of quality.

The expansion of the metalware trade and the introduction of new products and materials therefore influenced the perceived quality and hierarchy of different producers, products and trades. The classification and categorisation of objects in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century underwent a transformation. Michael Kwass suggests that epistemological shifts and the development of scientific discourse changed the perception of things.<sup>76</sup> When discussing the value of metals, Michel Foucault emphasises instead the way in which ‘things take on value... in relation to one another’ and that ‘the metal merely enables this value to be represented’.<sup>77</sup> He demonstrates the importance, on the one hand, of the materiality of the metal, or its ‘perfection’, such as its durability, utility, pleasure and rarity, but also the signifying power that the object possesses.<sup>78</sup> This is echoed by Bert De Munck’s discussion of

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<sup>74</sup> As explained in chapter 1 of this thesis.

<sup>75</sup> John Styles, “Product Innovation in Early Modern London,” *Past & Present* 168 (2000): 124-169.

<sup>76</sup> Michael Kwass, “Ordering the World of Goods: Consumer Revolution and the Classification of Objects in Eighteenth Century France,” *Representations* 82/1 (2003): 87-116.

<sup>77</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002), 191.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*



the ‘economics of convention’.<sup>79</sup> De Munck argues that value was increasingly deliberated in ways external to the product, and that ‘intrinsic value’ became largely obsolete. The quality, value, and classification of objects was therefore not just deliberated on an individual basis, but impacted upon the wider hierarchy of metal goods. With the integration of the new goods and materials into the marketplace, the taxonomy of goods changed. Previous definitions of quality were challenged, and thus there was the potential for them to be re-deliberated.

The hierarchy of quality was rarely discussed explicitly.<sup>80</sup> For the large part, consumers and the public were left to judge this for themselves. This meant that the perceived hierarchy of metalware was often intertwined with the ‘classification of people attached to those goods’.<sup>81</sup> It also allowed producers to influence the deliberation of quality through the products that they produced and marketed, and the debates that surrounded them. In some cases, these dialogues enforced the regulatory standards of quality that emphasised the intrinsic value and workmanship of metalware.<sup>82</sup> However, there was a greater importance placed upon variety and innovation. A conflict emerged between manufacturers in the new regional manufacturing towns, who often produced ‘new luxuries’, and producers of ‘old luxuries’ in the capital. Silversmiths, such as William Abdy, often criticised the

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<sup>79</sup> Bert De Munck, “Guilds, Product Quality and Intrinsic Value: Towards a History of Conventions?” *Historical Social Research* 36/4 (2011): 103-124.

<sup>80</sup> David Barnett, *London, Hub of the Industrial Revolution: A Revisionary History 1775-1825* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1998), 23; and Berg, “Product Innovation in Core Consumer Industries,” 140.

<sup>81</sup> Michel Callon, Cécile Méadel and Vololona Rabeharisoa, “The Economy of Qualities,” *Economy and Society* 31/2 (2002), 212.

<sup>82</sup> Outlined in chapter 1 of this thesis.

‘scandalous profession’ of silver plate.<sup>83</sup> Although Abdy did make goods in plated silver, he specialised in solid silver products and recognised the perceived hierarchy of particular products and trades. Nevertheless, Helen Clifford argues that some producers, and many consumers, placed a greater value on novelty and variety, which was reflected in the rising popularity of imitative materials and the changing attitude towards silver.<sup>84</sup>

The categorisation of metalware was in itself challenged. The ‘hardware’ trade, in particular, and its place in the perceived hierarchy of metalware, was difficult to define.<sup>85</sup> The uncertainty of these categories was exposed when the state negotiated the Eden Treaty with France in 1786. The trade deal encompassed a range of products, including metalware, ceramics and textiles. Consumer goods needed to be classified so that the correct duties could be imposed when they were imported and exported. British state officials interviewed prominent manufactures and required their opinion on the terms of trade between Britain and France, and how the range of consumer goods should be classified. The choice of interviewees highlights the thriving regional manufacturing towns by the end of the eighteenth century. The chosen representatives for the metalware trades included Matthew Boulton and Samuel Garbett from Birmingham; Thomas Settle, Joseph Parkin and Jonathan Watkinson, manufacturers from Sheffield; William Hoyle, the clerk of the Company of Cutlers in Sheffield; and

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<sup>83</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/14, ‘Minutes on the Sheffield Assay Office Petition’, 24 February 1773, f. 8.

<sup>84</sup> Clifford, “Innovation or Emulation?” 59.

<sup>85</sup> J.R. Harris, *Industrial Espionage and Technological Transfer: Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 173.

Richard Crawshay an iron merchant, and Alexander Rabey and Josh Stanley, manufacturers concerned with the iron trade in London and its neighbourhood.<sup>86</sup>

In particular, the parliamentary committee that led the interviews wanted clarification about how producers within the metalware trades defined 'hardware'. Boulton and Garbett claimed that hardware included:

All articles made of Iron or Steel/ of Brass or Copper/ of all yellow or white metal, or composition of metals/ of Tin or Pewter... of Pearl, Tortoiseshell, Ivory or Horn/ Of Leather or Morocco/ Of all gilt, plated silvered or Tin'd Articles/ Of all cutlery... /of all Watches...<sup>87</sup>

They emphasised that 'buttons is by much the most important article in the Hardware trade. Buckles is the next article of importance. Steel Toys of various sorts next'. When entering the negotiations with France, William Eden was encouraged to ensure that 'polished grates and other manufactures of a superior quality should be included under the head of hardware'.<sup>88</sup> It was in the interest of producers to broaden the category of hardware as much as possible because it meant those goods would be faced with lower duties. Nevertheless, the breadth of objects included in that category is notable. Moreover, the way in which the variety of products and materials, which included new luxuries and old luxuries, plain and decorative items, and objects of a high quality, emphasises the range of objects that influenced the perception of quality.

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<sup>86</sup> British Library, Add MS 34462, Auckland Papers, Vol. LI., 'Evidence for a Commercial Treaty with France', 1786.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, ff. 128-129.

<sup>88</sup> The National Archives, FO27/19, 'Letters and Papers from William Eden', 1786, Vol. 1, f. 158.

### 3.4 Innovation

The expanding market for metalware meant that there was a greater demand for product variety and innovation. As well as the development of new products and materials, producers developed new processes and technologies that enabled goods to be made more efficiently, in larger quantities, at a higher quality and a lower cost.<sup>89</sup> In particular, the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the development of die stamping and the fly press (Figure 3.3), new plating technology, pierced work, and improved finishing techniques.<sup>90</sup> Many innovations were small but had a big impact, or put existing technology to new use.<sup>91</sup> Joel Mokyr has argued that until the middle of the eighteenth century innovation was largely the result of ‘drift’ and was part of the everyday practice of producers, but gradually became part of wider systematic processes to innovate.<sup>92</sup> However, as historians such as Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten Van Zanden have pointed out, innovation was more planned before the end of the eighteenth century than Mokyr suggests, and in the case of metalware were largely focused around the new regional manufacturing towns.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Berg, “Commerce and Creativity,” 173-204.

<sup>90</sup> Judith Banister, *English Silver* (London: Cassell, 1987), 59-62; and Berg, “From Imitation to Invention,” 22.

<sup>91</sup> Berg, “Commerce and Creativity,” 184.

<sup>92</sup> Joel Mokyr, *The Lever of the Riches: Technology, Creativity and Economic Process* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 12.

<sup>93</sup> Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten Van Zanden, “Introduction: Technology, Skills and the Pre-Modern Economy in the East and the West,” in *Technology, Skills and the Pre-Modern Economy in the East and the West* ed. Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten Van Zanden (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1-2.

Birmingham and Sheffield, in particular, were at the forefront of the invention of new products and processes.<sup>94</sup> Not only was new technology, such as die stamping, used on the array of new products and materials, but it could also be applied to existing materials such as silver to increase the variety, and lower the cost, of ‘old’ luxuries. As argued by Joseph Hancock, a Sheffield silversmith, there was a ‘very great improvement in the silver way as to the silver branch it is so inconsiderable, I can’t describe it’.<sup>95</sup> It was this innovation that gave the regional producers a competitive edge. Moreover, it contributed to the perceived quality and hierarchy of metalware.

There were a number of notable differences between the production of metalware in regional manufacturing towns and traditional centres of production, such as London. Plate in Birmingham and Sheffield was generally stamped.<sup>96</sup> Die and drop stamping allowed objects to be produced quickly, efficiently, and accurately.<sup>97</sup> The process involved placing a sheet of the chosen metal between two dies - one of the desired shape and the other with the opposite design that was raised - so that when the top die was dropped, the sheet would take on the design between the dies. The

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<sup>94</sup> Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, “Technical Invention and Institutional Credit in France and Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century,” *History and Technology* 16/3 (2000), 292. The regional manufacturers in Birmingham, especially Matthew Boulton and James Watt, were also instrumental in the production of engine technology by the end of the eighteenth-century, which was applied beyond the metalware trade to steam-engines and the production of coinage. Jim Andrew, “The Soho Steam Engine Business,” in *Matthew Boulton: Selling what all the World Desires*, ed. Shena Mason (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 63-70.

<sup>95</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/12, ‘Committee on Petitions Relating to Assaying Plate’, 18 February 1773, f. 5.

<sup>96</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/15, ‘Committee of Sheffield Assay Petitioners’, 26 February 1773, f. 19.

<sup>97</sup> Molly Pearce, Marilyn Duerden and John Bartlett, *Sheffield Silver 1773-1973* (Sheffield: Sheffield City Museum, 1973), 13.

producer 'by means of a single pulley he raises a weight to the lower part of which is fixed another die; he lets the weight fall down on the metal, and the thing is done'.<sup>98</sup> Stamps, presses and dies had many different applications, and could be used with different products, designs and materials. As shown in Figure 3.3, an image of a producer using a drop stamp, stamping was often used to produce buttons and other small metal goods.



**Figure 3.3: *The Book of Trades or Library of Useful Arts, Part III, Third Edition* (London: Tabart and Co., 1805).**

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<sup>98</sup> *The Book of Trades, or Library of the Useful Arts, Part III, Third Edition* (London: Tabart & Co., 1805/6), 119.

It was therefore a popular piece of technology that was used by producers in the regional manufacturing towns. Again, this caused a conflict between producers using the new technology and those using traditional methods. John Wakelin, a silversmith in London, questioned the strength of stamped metalware. When asked ‘if it is the worse for being stamped provided it is of the same strength?’, he answered ‘I should judge it could not be of the same strength - not so usefull - should think it could not be stamped of the same strength’.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, it allowed small metal goods to be produced quickly and cheaply, and because the same die was used hundreds of times, the design was more accurate and reliable. The quality and clarity of dies improved significantly in the eighteenth century, when Benjamin Huntsman developed crucible steel from the 1760s.<sup>100</sup>

Products could be fashioned with sheet metal through die stamping, by hand raising and hammering, or through a mixture of the two methods.<sup>101</sup> Often, it was the legs or handles of individual objects, such as sauce boats, that were produced quickly using die stamps, whilst more delicate designs were made by hand. This can be seen by a pair of sauce boats made in silver by John Hoyland and Co., and assayed in Sheffield in 1773 (Figure 3.4). The handles and legs of the sauce boats, as was often the case, were stamped in two parts and then soldered together.<sup>102</sup> In contrast, the bodies of the sauce boats were produced and decorated by hand raising. These highly decorative sauce boats, made in silver, demonstrate the way in which technology was

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<sup>99</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/15, ‘Committee of Sheffield Assay Petitioners’, f. 20; For an analysis of Wakelin, see Helen Clifford, *Silver in London: The Parker and Wakelin Partnership 1760-1776* (London: Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>100</sup> Crosskey, *Old Sheffield Plate*, 33; and Pearce, Duerden and Bartlett, *Sheffield Silver*, 13.

<sup>101</sup> Crosskey, *Old Sheffield Plate*, 44.

<sup>102</sup> Pearce, Duerden and Bartlett, *Sheffield Silver*, 7.

not only used to produce large quantities of cheap metal goods in new materials, but also influenced the design and production of traditional materials and old luxuries.



**Figure 3.4: Sauce Boats, Sterling Silver, John Hoyland and Co., 1773, Sheffield Assay Office.**

The use of the fly press (depicted in the back of Figure 3.3) similarly demonstrates how new technologies allowed for a greater degree of design, efficiency and quality when producing pierced work.<sup>103</sup> Previously, pierced decoration had been sawn by hand.<sup>104</sup> However, because of the fly press, pierced work could have clean edges and a repetitive design. As seen by the pair of salt dishes made in sterling silver by John Parsons and Charles Hall, that were assayed in Sheffield in 1777 (Figure 3.5), this method was highly effective. The use of technology to make products more

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<sup>103</sup> Crosskey, *Old Sheffield Plate*, 36-7; and Eric Turner, *English Silver from 1660* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1985), 22.

<sup>104</sup> Pearce, Duerden and Bartlett, *Sheffield Silver*, 13.



efficiently at a lower cost did not come at the cost of quality, or at the cost of variety, beauty and aesthetic value.<sup>105</sup>



**Figure 3.5: Pair of Salts, Sterling Silver, John Parsons and Charles Hall, 1777, Sheffield Assay Office.**

Innovation in production and technology also aimed to improve other characteristics that were of importance to the consumer, such as durability. As plated goods became increasingly popular in the eighteenth century, there was concern about its lack of strength and durability, therefore producers competed to develop improvements in plating technologies.<sup>106</sup> The London goldsmiths claimed that their plated products were a higher quality than the regional manufactures, which they argued were ‘very slight and unserviceable’, and ‘certainly would be worn out

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<sup>105</sup> Francesca Carnevali, “Golden Opportunities: Jewelry Making in Birmingham between Mass Production and Speciality,” *Enterprise and Society* 4/2 (2003), 284.

<sup>106</sup> Although durability was an issue with Sheffield plate, many other new products and new steel alloys had a greater durability. Turner, *English Silver*, 22.

sooner'.<sup>107</sup> However, regional producers developed new production techniques and technologies that improved the quality of plated goods. In 1743, Thomas Boulsover, a Sheffield producer, invented Sheffield plate, which was a new way of plating with silver that saw copper plated with silver on both the upper and lower sides. This meant that it was closer to silver in appearance and could be worked more easily into different designs and products.<sup>108</sup>

Sheffield plate was especially difficult to fashion, therefore the technology associated with its production was crucial to its success.<sup>109</sup> The combination of the more effective rolling of Sheffield plate, and the development of die stamping, improved the quality of plated goods in the regional manufacturing towns. A taper candlestick, produced in Sheffield plate by Boulton and Fothergill in 1770 (Figure 3.6), demonstrates the physical and aesthetic differences of stamped Sheffield plate. It was thin and light, and so candlesticks made in Sheffield plate were given a lead or resin core, in order to add weight.<sup>110</sup> This made Sheffield plate products more practical, and also enhanced their imitation of silver. Aesthetically, it appeared different to products that were made of cast silver, as seen by the contrast to the silver candlesticks made by Boulton and Fothergill, discussed earlier in this chapter (Figure 3.2). Typically, metal goods that were made by casting silver were thicker and heavier than stamped metalware.<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, both types of production were used by

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<sup>107</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/11, 'Copy of Petition of Goldsmiths of London Against Sheffield & Birmingham Assay Office Petitions', ff. 3-4; and Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/15, 'Committee of Sheffield Assay Petitioners', f. 21.

<sup>108</sup> Clifford, "Innovation or Emulation?" 59.

<sup>109</sup> Pearce, Duerden and Bartlett, *Sheffield Silver*, 7.

<sup>110</sup> Banister, *English Silver*, 98.

<sup>111</sup> Peal, *Pewter of Great Britain*, 211.

Boulton to produce innovative and decorative quality metalware, both old and new luxuries, in a range of traditional and new materials. Therefore, the expanding market for metalware and the introduction of new products, designs and technology, influenced the perception of quality metalware.



**Figure 3.6: Taper Candlestick, Sheffield Plate, Boulton and Fothergill, 1770, Sheffield Millennium Gallery, L.1943.97.**

Many of these innovations in production and technology aimed to increase the accuracy and consistency of quality within the metalware trade. For example, the development of die stamping in the regional manufacturing towns of Birmingham and Sheffield increased the standardisation of production, as large quantities of products could be made in the same design using the same die stamps. This increasing standardisation of goods occurred across trades and materials, including within the

ceramic and textile trades.<sup>112</sup> Bert De Munck and Joel Mokyr argue that the standardisation of production increased the consistency of, and trust in, quality.<sup>113</sup> It has been argued that the greater consistency of products, and thus product quality, reduced the search costs for consumers. Once a consumer purchased one object, with which they were satisfied, they could trust in that producer to produce a high-quality product for any future purchases. The increasing standardisation helped with both the manufacturing and the marketing of metalware.<sup>114</sup>

Because of the increasing uniformity of goods in the regional manufacturing towns, such goods appeared distinctive in appearance, therefore established their desirability and a new aesthetic in the minds of consumers.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, it was not possible to mass-produce metalware on a large scale in the eighteenth century. Instead, producers in Birmingham focused upon their flexibility and market specialisation.<sup>116</sup> The technology associated with increasing standardisation was not incompatible with variety. In fact, the opposite was the case. Although stamping resulted in the increasing standardisation of metalware, different dies could be used for different parts of the object. For example, with the production of candlesticks (like Figure 3.6), different dies could be used for different parts of the object, such as the base, the stem, and the nozzle. Moreover, the same dies could be used in the production of different types of metal goods, not least using silver and Sheffield plate. Therefore, there was the great

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<sup>112</sup> Stanley D. Chapman, "The Innovating Entrepreneurs in the British Ready-Made Clothing Industry," *Textile History* 24/1 (1993): 5-25.

<sup>113</sup> De Munck, "Guilds, Product Quality and Intrinsic Value," especially 107-110; and Joel Mokyr, *The Gifts of Athena: Historical Origins of the Knowledge Economy* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 136-139.

<sup>114</sup> Styles, "Product Innovation," 131.

<sup>115</sup> Pearce, Duerden and Bartlett, *Sheffield Silver*, 13.

<sup>116</sup> Berg, "Commerce and Creativity," 174.

potential for variety, novelty and a range of designs and materials. The Birmingham and Sheffield producers were able to produce an increasing variety of goods of a high quality, both in terms of their intrinsic value, but also their innovation, variety and workmanship.

### 3.5 Value

As this chapter has shown, the expansion of the metalware trade, and the development of new products and materials affected the taxonomy of goods, the hierarchy of metalware, and the perception of quality. Consequently, it also influenced the perceived value of different types of metalware. Not only did different designs and production processes affect the intrinsic properties and value of particular products, but they also affected their price, popularity, and fashionability; moreover, the design of metalware contributed to their utility and symbolic value.<sup>117</sup> Value was not inherent in metalware, and was constantly being questioned and re-evaluated.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, different types of metalware were popular at different times across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The pewter trade, for example, was most successful at the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, although innovation in production and technology began in the late-seventeenth century, the most significant developments

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<sup>117</sup> Daniel Roche, *A History of Everyday Things*, trans. Brian Pearce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 11.

<sup>118</sup> Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna, "Locating and Dislocating Value: A Pragmatic Approach to Early Modern and Nineteenth-Century Economic Practices," in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture, 1500-1900*, ed. Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 1-30.

<sup>119</sup> John Hatcher and T.C. Barker, *A History of British Pewter* (London: Longman, 1974), 141.

occurred in the middle of the eighteenth century, and so accelerated the demand for new luxuries, innovation and novelty. There were minor fluctuations when the trade was affected by regional and national economic difficulties. For example, in 1772, the Birmingham trade suffered because of a national economic crisis, and Boulton complained that ‘the trade of Birmingham & of this place is rather dead at this juncture even so much that our London Waggoners have lately been obliged to make up their loading with coals for want of merchandise’.<sup>120</sup> However, on the whole, the metalware trade thrived and expanded in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Economic theory typically expects a higher price to reflect higher quality.<sup>121</sup> This can be seen as a way of signalling to the consumer that a product has greater intrinsic value, or degree of workmanship, invested into it. This was the case in the metalware trades to a certain extent. Within the iron trade, ‘the best English merchants iron is sold generally in the country, where it is made at £19 per ton’ and ‘ordinary mill iron at £14 - 10s per ton’.<sup>122</sup> However, the relationship between quality and price was more complex. As Andrew Popp explains, products cannot be directly compared because of their price - many other factors determined a product's value, including design, quality and reputation.<sup>123</sup> Particularly with the integration of new products and

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<sup>120</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/2/39, Letter Book 1768-73, ‘Letter from Matthew Boulton to the Earl of Warwick’, November 1772, f. 68.

<sup>121</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz, “The Causes and Consequences of the Dependence of Quality on Price,” *American Economic Association* 25/1 (1987), 3; and Pierre Claude Reynard, “Manufacturing Quality in the Pre-Industrial Age: Finding Value in Diversity,” *Economic History Review* 53/3 (2000), 509.

<sup>122</sup> British Library, Add MS 34462, Auckland Papers, Vol. LI., ‘Evidence for a Commercial Treaty with France’, 1786, f. 167.

<sup>123</sup> Andrew Popp, “Barriers to Innovation in Marketing in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: Merchant-Manufacturer Relationships,” *Business History* 44/2 (2002), 26.

materials into the market, quality was not always signalled by price. New materials were valued as much for their aesthetic value and novelty than their cost or intrinsic value. Furthermore, new technologies reduced the cost of production and increased the novelty, variety and quality of metalware.

There were two types of product differentiation across the metalware trades in England, which affected the quality and value of particular products. Firstly, there was a degree of variation in the intrinsic properties of metalware. Although the material composition of silver had to be assayed to ensure its adherence to the national legal standard, there could be slight variation. From a regulatory perspective, the standard of silver in Birmingham and Sheffield was more strictly enforced, and so ensured that their products were made in the highest composition of metalware, at 11oz 2dw per pound troy.<sup>124</sup> In contrast, the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths in London permitted the standard mark to be put on silver wares that were ‘from two to two and a half penny weights worse’ than the official standard, and so it was regularly just 11oz.<sup>125</sup> This difference was common practice, but also was written into parliamentary legislation, which specified the different minimum standards for each region. Similarly, a range of other metals could also be of varying alloys and compositions.<sup>126</sup> Pewter, for example, could be produced as fine, or hard pewter. Needles could be produced as either ‘ordinary’ or ‘extra-ordinary’. The material composition of the range of new materials, including Britannia metal, pinchbeck and ormolu, had no regulation, therefore could vary based on the recipes of different producers. Therefore,

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<sup>124</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/37, ‘Letter Samuel Garbett to Matthew Boulton’, 3 May 1773.

<sup>125</sup> Sheffield City Archives, SOA/2/3/1, ‘Copies of Letters Relating to Assay Office in Sheffield’, f. 4.

<sup>126</sup> As outlined in chapter 1 of this thesis.

all groups of products - old luxuries, new luxuries, and hardware - had gradients of quality.

Secondly, objects may have appeared similar to the eye, but could be produced using different technology, such as through stamping or casting, which made them cheaper to produce. Not only did Birmingham and Sheffield producers make goods of a higher quality - in a wider variety of designs and materials, with a higher intrinsic value - but they could also make them at a lower price, which made their products more desirable. It was widely accepted by contemporary producers and consumers that metalware was cheaper outside London in the new manufacturing towns. In particular, candlesticks and branches could be purchased for a lower price from the regional producers.<sup>127</sup> A Sheffield candlestick of 20 ounces would have cost £10 2s 6d, in contrast to the London price of £15 or £16.<sup>128</sup> Specifically, this difference amounted to plate in London being sold at 10s per ounce, which was more than the regional products.<sup>129</sup> One reason for this difference in cost was the lower cost of living and wages of workers in the regional manufacturing towns, where there were 'good wages, and cheaper necessities and conveniences at Sheffield and Birmingham'.<sup>130</sup> The different stages of production could also be undertaken more cheaply. Polishing, for

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<sup>127</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/15, 'Committee of Sheffield Assay Petitioners', 26 February 1773, f. 11.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, f. 20.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, f. 11.

<sup>130</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/13, 'Reply of the Petitioners from Birmingham and Sheffield to the Cast of the Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Plateworkers of the City of London and Places Adjacent', f. 3.



example, ‘could be done at Sheffield for half the money [than in London]’.<sup>131</sup> Consequently, ‘the country masters live at less expense’.<sup>132</sup>

In Sheffield, the combination of location, technology and skill improved the quality of their metal goods. As part of the information collected for the negotiation of the Eden Treaty in 1786, William Hoyle, the clerk of the Company of Cutlers in Sheffield, claimed that the products made by the cutlers in Sheffield were of a higher quality and a lower price. He said that this was because of:

... the cheapness of our fuel, upon our skill, upon our tools, upon the excellence of our steel, and upon the convenience of our streams for the purpose of mills, and upon our manufactures being long established and in high vogue - we are told too that there are no such grinding stones in the world as those we have.<sup>133</sup>

Therefore, the adoption of new technologies and improvements in the production of metalware in the regional manufacturing towns, was capital saving, and increased the quality of production. Consequently, producers in the regional manufacturing towns increased the quality and lowered the cost of their metalware.

The impact of innovation on the quality, price and value of metalware is clearly seen by the pricing strategy of Boulton. In his notebook, Boulton made a number of

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<sup>131</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/12, ‘Copy Report on Sheffield and Birmingham Assay Office Petitions’, f. 3.

<sup>132</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/13, ‘Reply of the Petitioners from Birmingham and Sheffield to the Cast of the Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Plateworkers of the City of London and Places Adjacent’, f. 3.

<sup>133</sup> British Library, Add MS 34462, Auckland Papers, Vol. LI., ‘Evidence for a Commercial Treaty with France’, 1786, ff. 48-50.

calculations in order to determine how cheaply he could produce quality metalware. He wrote: 'the thinness of the above plating appeared of as good a face as the thickest & is as much cheaper as 20 is less than 48 pence'.<sup>134</sup> The melting and casting of metal in the regions also meant that it was 'much cheaper than the manufactures in and about the City of London'.<sup>135</sup> Quickenden suggests that Boulton was able to charge lower prices because his use of die stamps and sheet metal meant that his products were lighter and thinner, and so were cheaper when metalware was sold by weight. Therefore, a pair of 38oz candlestick cost £17 2s, in contrast to the London producer Thomas Helling who used 108oz of silver for his pair of candlesticks that cost £44 11s.<sup>136</sup> Price was not just determined by the value and cost of the materials which were used, but also the workmanship, which was costed separately in addition to the weight of the raw materials. The cost of workmanship was actually higher in Birmingham and Sheffield than in London.<sup>137</sup> It was therefore the technological advancement, and the lower cost of producing materials that lowered the cost of regional metalware, rather than it being because they were of a lower quality or standard of workmanship.

The use of new technologies by the regional producers, such as die stamps and fly presses, meant that in order to profit, regional manufacturers prioritised larger

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<sup>134</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/108/5, 'Notebook', 1768-75, ff. 15-16.

<sup>135</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 22218, 'List of the Subscribers Towards the Cost of a Parliamentary Bill for the Introduction of an Additional Duty', 1755.

<sup>136</sup> Kenneth Quickenden and Arthur J. Kover, "Did Boulton Sell Silver Plate to the Middle Class? A Quantitative Study of Luxury Marketing in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Journal of Macromarketing* 27/1 (2007), 54.

<sup>137</sup> Kenneth Quickenden suggests that this is because it was more expensive for Matthew Boulton to use traditional methods such as hammering and casting because of the cost of the subcontracted labour for these processes. *Ibid*; and Kenneth Quickenden, "Boulton and Fothergill Silver: Business Plans and Miscalculations," *Art History* 5/3 (1980), 281.

quantities of production at lower prices. The expense of new machinery meant that they needed to produce larger quantities in order to reduce the cost.<sup>138</sup> Especially with die stamping, it was the production of the die itself that was time-consuming and costly. In 1771, a pair of dies cost one guinea per pair, but ‘a pair of dyes will last forever, and will always be at your disposal’.<sup>139</sup> Therefore, they needed to be fully utilised to produce large quantities of metalware. As a result, regional producers argued that they would ‘be content with less profits’ if it meant attracting more customers.<sup>140</sup> Boulton claimed that he ‘would rather choose to make great quantities with small profits, than small quantities with large profits’.<sup>141</sup> Manufacturers were not always motivated by higher profit margins, but wanted to develop their innovations and reputation for quality production. For example, Boulton was driven in his attempt to make ormolu a success by his desire for quality, which came about because of his frustration at the poor quality of Soho gilding.<sup>142</sup> This is what motivated the entrepreneur manufacturers across different trades, including the ceramics producer Josiah Wedgwood, who decided not to compete necessarily upon price, but focused

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<sup>138</sup> Christof Jeggle, “Pre-industrial Worlds of Production: Conventions, Institutions and Organizations,” *Historical Social Research* 36/4 (2011), 128.

<sup>139</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, ‘Letter to Sir H. Harbord Bast’, 26 September 1771.

<sup>140</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/13, ‘Reply of the Petitioners from Birmingham and Sheffield to the Cast of the Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Plateworkers of the City of London and Places Adjacent’, f. 3.

<sup>141</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/10, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1774-7, ‘Letter Matthew Boulton to Mr Green’, 6 August 1774, f. 87.

<sup>142</sup> Uglow, *The Lunar Men*, 201.

upon quality.<sup>143</sup> However, as this chapter has shown, the new technology within the metalware trades satisfied both, to improve variety and quality, and to lower price.

In this changing landscape of production, the target consumer also changed. Of the London goods, it was said that ‘the inferiority of the work, and the exorbitant prices, in spite of the very prevailing taste for plate, renders it unsaleable to all but a few rich people’.<sup>144</sup> However, with their combination of higher quality and lower price, the Birmingham and Sheffield producers appealed to a wider audience. Their products were luxuries for the mass market, which reflected the shifting meaning of luxury in the eighteenth century.<sup>145</sup> The variety of consumer choice, products, prices and materials, meant that more people could afford to purchase metal goods. Quickenden argues that Boulton did not, in practice, sell his products to a new middle class clientele.<sup>146</sup> Instead, his analysis of Boulton’s orders suggests that the majority of Boulton’s orders came from the upper classes. However, Quickenden’s focus on silver plate aspect of Boulton’s business neglects his full range of products and materials.

It was not just the producer who decided the value of their products, but also the consumer. As discussed earlier in this chapter, product value and quality was deliberated. When setting their prices and marketing new products, producers were

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<sup>143</sup> Neil McKendrick, “Josiah Wedgwood: An Eighteenth-Century Entrepreneur in Salesmanship and Marketing Techniques,” *Economic History Review* 12/3 (1960), 410; and Robin Holt and Andrew Popp, “Josiah Wedgwood, Manufacturing and Craft,” *Journal of Design History* 29/2 (2016): 99-119.

<sup>144</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/13, ‘Reply of the Petitioners from Birmingham and Sheffield to the Cast of the Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Plateworkers of the City of London and Places Adjacent’, f. 1.

<sup>145</sup> Kwass, “Ordering the World of Goods,” 92-93.

<sup>146</sup> Quickenden and Kover, “Did Boulton Sell Silver Plate to the Middle Class?” 51.

largely influenced by consumer demand, and what a consumer would be prepared to spend. These judgements of value often came down to personal choice. There were different perceptions of which goods were superior or inferior, which was heavily influenced by the conflict between producers in London and the regional manufacturing towns who each wanted to persuade the consumer of the superiority of their goods. It was argued by the Birmingham producers, that ‘were they [the London goldsmiths] therefore really conscious, as they pretended to be, that their productions were more elegant, more useful, and of more intrinsic value than those of all others’, then they would have not opposed the opening of the new Assay Office.<sup>147</sup> Instead, the Birmingham producers claimed that ‘the fact is directly otherwise - the plate made in and near London is not of uncommonly intrinsic value, the workmanship is not so masterly, the designs are not so elegant or convenient, nor is the price so reasonable’.<sup>148</sup> Not only could the regional producers compete directly with the London producers by being able to produce their goods at higher quality and a lower price, but they also provided the consumer with a wider choice of designs and materials.

The integration of new products and materials in the marketplace therefore challenged the traditional hierarchy of products, both in terms of value and quality, as they influenced the taste and demand of consumers. Many of the ‘toys’ produced by the regional producers were successful because they could be sold at a lower price, and so appealed to a wider range of national and international consumers. Sheffield plate was an appealing alternative to solid silver because of its imitative nature and

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<sup>147</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/13, ‘Reply of the Petitioners from Birmingham and Sheffield to the Cast of the Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Plateworkers of the City of London and Places Adjacent’, f. 1.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

high quality. It became so popular that soon its price rose, and its value stretched above the solid silver that it was designed to imitate.<sup>149</sup> Fashion, design and innovation played a more important role in this determination of value, and the producer and consumer played a greater part in this deliberation.

## **Conclusion**

The expanding market for metalware from the late-seventeenth century led to the proliferation of new producers, products and processes, especially in Birmingham and Sheffield. The success of the trade in these new manufacturing centres was the result of three key factors, which this chapter has highlighted: producers had the incentives to expand the size of their firms; they had the skills to innovate and develop new products, materials and designs; and, perhaps most importantly, they were able to produce goods at a higher quality and at a lower price than metropolitan competitors. In particular, it was their innovations that had the greatest impact. Innovation in production processes and technologies encouraged the greater standardisation of metalware, but also allowed for an increasing variety of materials and designs.

The range of new products and materials influenced the hierarchy of goods, and the perceived value of objects. The quality and desirability of metalware was not just determined by the physical intrinsic value of the artefact, but by the perception of value. The literature suggests that the intrinsic value of metal goods was becoming obsolete in the eighteenth century with the decline of the guilds.<sup>150</sup> However, intrinsic

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<sup>149</sup> Clifford, “Innovation or Emulation?” 59-80.

<sup>150</sup> De Munck, “Guilds, Product Quality and Intrinsic Value,” 103-124; and Bettoni, “Usefulness, Ornamental Function and Novelty,” 171-207.

value continued to be a concern, and producers boasted of higher standards of quality in terms of intrinsic value, as well as workmanship and innovation. New luxuries and imitative metals co-existed alongside old luxuries and traditional types of metalware. Nevertheless, across all types of metalware, novelty and variety became increasingly important. The rise of die stamping and new technologies gave producers new opportunities to provide the consumer with greater choice. As a result, producers worked inside and outside the guild system to re-define the perception of quality, and ensure their influence and success in the new taxonomy of producers and products.

## Chapter 4.

### **Moving People, Products and Processes: The Relationship between London, Birmingham and Sheffield**

The expansion of the metalware trade in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries led to the emergence of three important regions of production: London, Birmingham and Sheffield. The literature has often separated these new regional manufacturing towns from the London metalware trades.<sup>1</sup> This is highly problematic as it hides the consistent movement of people, products and ideas between these centres. The expansion of the trade and the circulation of people and products was supported by improved communication and transportation. The first public stagecoach between Birmingham and London was established in 1731, and the journey time was reduced to just two days in 1742.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it was easier for producers and their products to

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<sup>1</sup> Historians often focus upon regional studies of the metalware trades, such as Peter M. Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, Technology and Culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); Maxine Berg, "Commerce and Creativity in Eighteenth-Century Birmingham," in *Markets and Manufacture in Early Industrial Europe*, ed. Maxine Berg (London: Routledge, 1991), 173-204; and David Mitchell, "Innovation and the Transfer of Skill in the Goldsmith's Trade in Restoration London," in *Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Bankers: Innovation and the Transfer of Skill, 1550 to 1750*, ed. David Mitchell (Stroud: Sutton, 1995), 5-22. An exception is Helen Clifford, "Concepts of Invention, Identity and Imitation in the London and Provincial Metal-Working Trades, 1750-1800," *Journal of Design History* 12/3 (1999): 241-255, which looks at the movement of imitative practices and technology between London, Birmingham and Sheffield.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Quickenden, "Boulton and Fothergill Silver: Business Plans and Miscalculations," *Art History* 3/3 (1980), 277; and Michael Freeman, "Transport," in *Atlas of Industrializing Britain: 1780-1914*, ed. John Langton and R.J. Morris (London: Methuen, 1986), 80-94.



circulate. Letters were also increasingly used, and facilitated communication between manufacturers, retailers and consumers. This allowed a wider range of consumers, socially and geographically, to access products that were manufactured in different regions.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it meant that changes in the production and perception of metalware in one region, impacted upon and influenced the production and consumption of metalware in other regions. It is therefore crucial to consider the relationship between these three regions, and the movement of people, products and processes.

As shown in the previous chapter, the expansion of the metalware trade led to the production of an increasing range of products and materials, and innovation in production techniques and technologies. This chapter shows that new products emerged in conjunction with, and in many ways because of, changes in the organisation of production. Production tasks became increasingly specialised, and the subcontracting of different stages of production meant that products travelled between multiple pairs of hands, often in different workshops, before they were sold to consumers. This changing organisation of production contributed to the increasing movement of producers, products and ideas between different centres of production. More significantly, it also impacted upon the ability of producers to produce quality metalware. A flexible organisation of production allowed producers to more easily access workers with different skills, and so they were able to provide consumers with a wider variety of products, materials and designs. Producers benefitted from their ability to produce an increasing variety of products by circulating pattern books and

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<sup>3</sup> Maxine Berg, "Product Innovation in Core Consumer Industries in Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *Technological Revolutions in Europe*, ed. Maxine Berg and Kristine Bruland (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1998), 139.

samples of their products with other producers and consumers, which placed a greater emphasis upon aesthetic value and fashionability. However, it also improved the intrinsic quality and workmanship of products by encouraging the regular assessment of quality, by providing subcontractors with patterns to work from, closely monitoring their work, and testing samples of metalware.

It is only by understanding the connections between Birmingham, Sheffield and London, that it is possible to capture the changes that occurred within the metalware trades in England from the late-seventeenth century. The first part of the chapter explores the movement of producers, who travelled between different workshops across the country and in Continental Europe. Firms increasingly used subcontracting and a flexible organisation of production that relied upon the movement of people, products and technologies. The chapter then considers the movement of products and ideas, including the circulation of pattern books and samples of products, which producers shared with retailers and consumers. The movement of people, products and ideas had implications on the quality of metalware. Although the movement of producers and products increased the availability of skilled workers, product variety and innovative technologies, it required a higher level of quality control, and the careful protection of new products and designs.

#### **4.1 The Movement of People**

Birmingham, Sheffield and London cannot be seen in isolation, not least because of the constant movement of people between these regions. The various ‘physical and conceptual geographies’ were intertwined, especially towns across England and the court in London, because there was a necessary movement of people politically,

economically and socially.<sup>4</sup> More specifically within the metalware trades, the movement of producers was necessary for their expansion and success. Although producers in the expanding regional manufacturing towns of Birmingham and Sheffield were eager to establish their own trade identities, producers in these areas were reliant upon each other, and on the central trade in London, to obtain crucial capital, raw materials and skilled producers. Birmingham and Sheffield producers had to turn to successful producers and influential members of the social elite in London for credit and investment in their businesses. Within the silver trade, it was necessary for producers to obtain their silver bullion from refiners, which often had to be sourced from merchants and manufacturers in other regions. For example, Robert Albion Cox, a London refiner, was contracted by Birmingham's Matthew Boulton to supply his manufactory with silver in 1772.<sup>5</sup> Samuel Garbett, a Sheffield refiner, was also employed by Boulton to supply 'several thousand pounds worth of silver in a year'.<sup>6</sup> Producers therefore developed close working relationships with each other across the three regions.

Many prominent producers travelled across the country to maintain their social and business connections, and to establish relationships with potential retailers, consumers and business partners. In order to manage their affairs in multiple locations at once, some producers decided to employ agents.<sup>7</sup> James Watt, for example, became

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<sup>4</sup> David Mitchell, "The Three Londons," in *City Merchants and the Arts 1670-1720*, ed. Mireille Galinou (London: Oblong Creative, 2004), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Quickenden, "Boulton and Fothergill Silver," 285.

<sup>6</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/13, 'Committee on the Sheffield Assay Petitions', 19 February 1773, f. 2.

<sup>7</sup> For an expanded discussion about the role of agents and the retailing of metalware see chapter 7. For literature on agents, see Berg, "Product Innovation in Core Consumer Industries," 150. For literature on agents in the textile trade, see Lesley Ellis Miller,

one of Boulton's agents in London in 1776, and utilised his social and business connections to raise awareness of their manufactory and attract more consumers. The agent's role was varied, and was largely based on trust and mutual interest. Producers often sent large quantities of products with the agent to sell in the different cities, and so had to trust that the agent would not abscond with the valuable items. Yet there was money to be made. Mr Bernard Holbrook, an agent to Hyland & Company at Sheffield, was paid '£100 a year &... paid £10 for a warehouse to put their goods in'.<sup>8</sup> On other occasions, the agent would seek out customers and take orders. Holbrook would 'receive the orders from shops in London for Hyland & co', and report back to Sheffield the quantity and design of the order.<sup>9</sup> The role of the agent had become crucial in the eighteenth century, and was necessary to sustain the connections between the various places of production, retail and consumption across the country. When Holbrook was asked 'whether it was a matter of choice or necessity that he was employed as agent to Hyland & Company? He said necessity'.<sup>10</sup>

In order for the regional manufacturing towns to expand, Birmingham and Sheffield manufacturers often had to attract workers from other regions.<sup>11</sup> Hundreds of people worked in the metalware trades in Birmingham and Sheffield; yet in the

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"Innovation and Industrial Espionage in Eighteenth-Century France: An Investigation of the Selling of Silks through Samples," *Journal of Design History* 12/3 (1999): 271-292.

<sup>8</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/12, 'Copy Report on Sheffield and Birmingham Assay Office Petitions', f. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, f. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, f. 8.

<sup>11</sup> This builds upon recent literature on the mobility of workers. For example, Liliane Hilaire-Pérez and Catherine Verna, "Dissemination of Technical Knowledge in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era: New Approaches and Methodological Issues," *Technology and Culture* 47/3 (2006): 536-565.

early years of their expansion it was difficult to find local producers with specialist skills, particularly within the silver trade. Regional manufacturers, such as Boulton, attracted silversmiths, chasers, braziers and coppersmiths from London.<sup>12</sup> Even at a time of conflict and competition between London and the regional manufacturing towns, surrounding the opening of the Sheffield Assay Office in 1773, the ‘guardians of the standard’ selected the London producer Daniel Bradbury as their assay officer, despite receiving applications from producers in Sheffield.<sup>13</sup> One reason for this wider movement of producers was the reluctance of manufacturers to attract workers from their regional counterparts. There was an ‘unspoken rule’ between manufacturers, where custom dictated that they should not poach workers from each other. When this did happen, it caused conflict within communities of producers. On one occasion, Boulton apologised to John Taylor for ‘secretly seducing’ a worker from him, in retaliation for a worker that he thought Taylor had previously taken.<sup>14</sup> Boulton concluded that they should ‘proceed hereafter upon a more gentleman like plan which I’m convinced will induce more to our mutual interest pleasure good neighbourhood & reputation than the shabby custom of secretly seducing each other servts’.<sup>15</sup>

The steady movement of skilled workers brought many advantages. It allowed regional producers to import new skills and expertise, and therefore develop the

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<sup>12</sup> Eric Delieb, *The Great Silver Manufactory: Matthew Boulton and the Birmingham Silversmiths 1760-1790* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), 37.

<sup>13</sup> Sheffield City Archives, SAO/2/3/1, ‘Copies of Letters Relating to Assay Office in Sheffield’, 1773.

<sup>14</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/2/11, Letter Book 1768-73, ‘Letter from Matthew Boulton to John Taylor’, 23 January 1769, f. 11.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

quality, innovation and product variety that they became known for.<sup>16</sup> However, it also meant that producers could lose their own workers, and with them their tools, new designs, and technologies. A number of producers in Birmingham travelled to work in France, such as Michael Alcock who set up a hardware manufactory in France in 1756.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the *Public Advertiser* warned in 1767 that ‘Manufactories in the Jewelry, Toy, and Hardware business, have lately been established at Berne in Switzerland, whether a great number of artists and workmen are lately gone from Birmingham, on promise of greater advantage’.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, manufacturers could not prevent producers moving to other workshops, regions or countries.

#### **4.2 Subcontracting and the Expanding Places of Production**

From the late-seventeenth century, producers increasingly relied on the movement of workers, as there was a shift towards a flexible organisation of production.<sup>19</sup> In order to expand and produce a wider variety of products and designs, producers subcontracted specialist roles within the production process to local workers, or craftsmen in other regions. Although individual manufacturers often possessed a wide range of skills and tools which could be applied to different products and materials,

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<sup>16</sup> As discussed in chapter 3. See also, Hilaire-Pérez and Verna, “Dissemination of Technical Knowledge,” especially 541-544.

<sup>17</sup> J.R. Harris, *Industrial Espionage and Technological Transfer: Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 203; Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, “Invention and the State in 18th-Century France,” *Technology and Culture* 32/4 (1991), 911.

<sup>18</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Issue 10042 (7 January 1767).

<sup>19</sup> Berg, “Commerce and Creativity,” 173-204; and Charles Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin, eds., *World of Possibilities: Flexibility and Mass Production in Western Industrialization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

the use of subcontracting and a flexible organisation of production further expanded the potential variety of products.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, it reduced the cost of production, as manufacturers could outsource labour when there was demand for particular designs, products and materials, rather than permanently paying for centralised workers.<sup>21</sup> This changing organisation of production contributed to the movement of people and products between Birmingham, Sheffield and London. It also contributed to the wider shift in the perceived quality of different types of production and manufacturing, where novelty and variety became increasingly important.<sup>22</sup>

The use of subcontracting and a flexible organisation of production was particularly effective within the metalware trade. The manufacturing of metal goods could be easily divided into distinct processes, which allowed producers to develop the specialist skills and expertise that the metalware trade required. For example, there was a clear distinction within the pewter trade between hammering, lathe-work and casting.<sup>23</sup> This list of specialisms covered a wide range of skills and processes, including ‘carvers, chasers, engravers, designers, enamellers, jewellers, and other artists in the precious metals’.<sup>24</sup> The toy trade and gun manufacturing, were best known for the flexibility of their small-scale production, but this organisation of

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<sup>20</sup> Chapter 3 of this thesis elaborated on the role of entrepreneurs and influential manufacturers who possessed a wide range of skills.

<sup>21</sup> Pat Hudson, “Industrial Organization and Structure,” in *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain. Volume 1: Industrialisation, 1700-1860*, ed. Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 37.

<sup>22</sup> Giorgio Riello, “Strategies and Boundaries: Subcontracting and the London Trades in the Long Eighteenth Century,” *Enterprise and Society* 9/2 (2008), 247.

<sup>23</sup> John Hatcher and T.C. Barker, *A History of British Pewter* (London: Longman, 1974), 222.

<sup>24</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/23, ‘Memorial Relative to Assaying and Marking Wrought Plate at Birmingham, & c.’, f. 2.

production could be applied to all areas of the metalware trade.<sup>25</sup> The account book of an unnamed goldsmith covering the period 1664 to 1690 reflects the diversity of roles that were divided and subcontracted.<sup>26</sup> In the year from March 1687, for example, the goldsmith recorded that they had paid 3s to Thomas Allen for the gilding of buttons; £1104 1s 9d to Mr Nathan for gold; £17 to Watts for burnishing; £12 10s for a gold chain and buttons; and £5 7s 6d to John Brattell for assaying silver and gold. Subcontracting was increasingly relied upon in the eighteenth century. By the 1770s, Parker and Wakelin, a successful partnership of silversmiths that were based in London, had 75 subcontractors who provided a range of different products, skills and services.<sup>27</sup> This meant that there was an ever-expanding number of producers involved in the production of metalware.

Producers in Birmingham and Sheffield developed a reputation for their flexible organisation of production, new technologies, and their diverse range of trades and skills. The flexible organisation of production was facilitated in these expanding regional manufacturing towns by the large number of people who worked within the metalware trade. Producers often shared subcontracted workers, tools and technologies, or employed workers on a flexible basis so that they regularly moved between different workshops. Larger manufacturers, such as Boulton and Taylor, employed hundreds of people, and subcontracted on an even larger scale. However, a wide variety of producers with smaller workshops developed networks of workers and

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<sup>25</sup> Clive Behagg, "Mass Production Without the Factory: Craft Producers, Guns and Small Firm Innovation, 1790-1815," *Business History* 40/3 (1998), 5.

<sup>26</sup> The National Archives, C114/179, Chancery Masters' Exhibits, 'Goldsmith Account Book 1664-1690'.

<sup>27</sup> Helen Clifford, *Silver in London: The Parker and Wakelin Partnership 1760-1776* (London: Yale University Press, 2004), 13.



subcontractors.<sup>28</sup> For example, Thomas Gloves, a toymaker in Birmingham, employed ten people, and William Bullock, a plater, employed double that number.<sup>29</sup> Maxine Berg argues that a ‘workshop economy’ developed in the regional manufacturing towns because of their reliance upon smaller factories and subcontracting systems, in contrast to the textile trade and the cotton industry which was based around larger factories.<sup>30</sup> Workers were either employed for a specific period of time, and paid wages, or, as was more often the case, were paid piece-work. Producers also used travelling journeymen, who travelled the country to work after being apprenticed but before they became masters. However, journeymen only earned a limited amount for their work. In Sheffield, as Campbell noticed, ‘the trade of a cutler affords large profits to the master, and the Journeymen earn the common wages of twelve or fifteen shillings a week’.<sup>31</sup>

The constant demand for workers across the metalware trades was reflected in national and regional newspapers, which frequently advertised manufacturers who were looking for particular types of workmen, or skilled workers who were seeking work. For example, an advertisement in *Aris’s Birmingham Gazette* informed the public: ‘WANTED immediately, a Man in the Steel Chain Business, who can begin

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<sup>28</sup> Maxine Berg, “Small Producer Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Business History* 35/1 (1993): 17-39.

<sup>29</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/15, ‘Workers in Silver at Birmingham - List of Names’, f. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Berg, “Small Producer Capitalism,” 21. Nevertheless, as shown in chapter 3 of this thesis, the trade in Birmingham and Sheffield was dominated by a number of influential manufacturers who undertook the production of metalware on a larger scale.

<sup>31</sup> R. Campbell, *The London Tradesman. Being a Compendious View of all the Trades, Professions, Arts, Both Liberal and Mechanic, Now Practiced in the Cities of London and Westminster* (London, 1747), 239.

and finish his own Work, and make his own patterns; an ingenious workman’.<sup>32</sup> Another advertisement sought ‘three or four journeymen Tin-plate workers, that are good workmen may meet with constant employment, and every encouragement due to their merit, by applying to Thomas Richardson at no. 10, opposite the Black-boy in Edgbaston-street, Birmingham’.<sup>33</sup> A wide variety of roles reoccurred in advertisements, expressing the need for apprentices, journeymen with particular skills, and producers who might want to enter a partnership.<sup>34</sup>

The regular employment of new workers encouraged the movement of producers between Birmingham, Sheffield and London. Producers were willing to move where there was work, and often sought employment in a different area. Those who could afford to, advertised their desire to find work, such as an advertisement in *Aris’s Birmingham Gazette* in 1772, which stated:

Wants employment, a person who would be glad to serve as an under clerk or warehouseman on very reasonable terms; has been used to the hardware and nail business, packing &c. &c. Can have a good character. Has no objection to leaving Birmingham. Would be glad of any occasional employ, if wanted by anyone in town, till he meets with a place - Enquire for S.N. at the printers.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Aris’s Birmingham Gazette*, 4 July 1791.

<sup>33</sup> *Aris’s Birmingham Gazette*, Issue 1572 (6 January 1772).

<sup>34</sup> In 1764, the *Lloyd’s Evening Post*, a publication in London, advertised: ‘WANTED A partner of an undeniable character and reputation, who understands the ironmongery and hardware business, or has been used to assist in a toy-shop, and can advance a capital of 1500l to 2000l or upwards’. *Lloyd’s Evening Post*, Issue 1150 (21 November 1764).

<sup>35</sup> *Aris’s Birmingham Gazette*, Issue 1573 (13 January 1772).

The producer claimed to have ‘no objection to leaving Birmingham’, which suggests that they anticipated that readers of the advertisement might be in, or have contacts in, other areas.

Workers and journeymen also wrote directly to prominent manufacturers to advertise their skills and seek employment. The producer John Markham wrote to Boulton from Sheffield in 1769, expressing a desire to move to Birmingham to work in his manufactory. Markham explained that ‘I am chaser and modeller, and can cut dice. Mr Tudor has brought me here from London four years ago. I stay’d with him about two years and half. I have since been entirely employ’d for W Hancock. I should like to come to your place, if I had any prospect of getting any business’.<sup>36</sup> Another producer, Henry Stedman, wrote to Boulton for work in 1769, explaining that he did ‘know how to gett together in the best & cheapest manner & am clear I can point out improvement in the business which if properly supported may be well worthy notice’.<sup>37</sup> Other workers used influential intermediaries who could write on their behalf. Boulton wrote to the Duke of Richmond, asking him to find employment for ‘a man of good sense & good manners... general good workman. He can fit & fixe accurate enough for the best mathematical instruments... he can draw & modell ornaments’.<sup>38</sup> Producers were therefore able to communicate across long distances through letters and newspaper advertisements, which increased the ease with which

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<sup>36</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/18, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1769, ‘Letter from John Markham’, 1769.

<sup>37</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/18, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1769, ‘Letter from Henry Stedman’, 10 November 1769.

<sup>38</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/2/40, Letter Book 1768-73, ‘Letter Matthew Boulton to the Duke of Richmond’, 4 December 1772, f. 71.

workers could move between workshops and manufactories across Birmingham, Sheffield and London.

Employing workers or subcontractors on a flexible basis provided many advantages for the manufacturer.<sup>39</sup> With the expansion of the trade and the increasing variety of products, materials and designs, it meant that producers could employ workers with specialist skills as and when they were needed. Therefore, it could reduce the long-term production costs for the producer. When consumer demand was high, and business was successful, producers could employ more subcontractors to complete their orders. Likewise, when there was less consumer demand, or a period of economic uncertainty, producers would not be burdened with a large number of workers. Therefore, this organisation of production often disadvantaged the workers themselves, as ‘journeymen and labourers will be reduced to want and beggary’, during periods of unemployment and economic difficulty.<sup>40</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, some producers, such as Boulton, attempted to put these various production processes under one roof to bring the process under greater control. What was once undertaken in small, separate workshops, was in some cases expanded into larger manufactories.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, even these manufacturers continued to use a flexible organisation of production and relied upon subcontracting for particular roles.

The flexible organisation of production and use of subcontracting was also beneficial to producers because it meant that they could access workers with specialist skills and expertise. One skill that was especially desirable was the ability to draw patterns, designs or decorations. Boulton himself admitted to being ‘a bad designer of

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<sup>39</sup> Riello, “Strategies and Boundaries,” 243-280.

<sup>40</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 22218, ‘List of the Subscribers Towards the Cost of a Parliamentary Bill for the Introduction of an Additional Duty’, 1755.

<sup>41</sup> Berg, “Commerce and Creativity,” 184.

cyphers', and so relied on consumers or subcontractors to 'send me a correct drawing both of the cypher, the vine, & the other coat of arms' as he 'cannot pretend to hit it in a design'.<sup>42</sup> Another role that was often subcontracted was polishing, which could easily be completed as piece-work. Polishers were also occasionally responsible for getting silverware assayed, which the agent 'delivers to the polisher, who gets them hall'd, afterwards polishes them, and then returns them to the witness [the agent] in order to be delivered to the shops'.<sup>43</sup> Polishing had to be undertaken after the product was assayed in case the surface of the metal was damaged during transportation or in its time at the Assay Office. Therefore, by subcontracting this process, the quality of the polishing could be better preserved because it was polished after the assay process and so was not damaged on the trip to and from the Assay Office. This also provided benefits for the subcontractor, who collected and kept waste silver during the polishing process. Sheffield polishers made the cost of their labour competitive by charging only 20d for polishing a pair of candlesticks, whilst also saving the waste, in contrast to the 3s a pair that the London polishers charged.<sup>44</sup>

From the late-seventeenth century, manufacturers were therefore able to utilise an increasing variety of labour, including journeymen, subcontractors, business partners and workers with specific skills. More significantly, skilled workers were often available at short-notice, which contributed to a flexible organisation of production that allowed the metalware trades to thrive and expand. This innovation in the organisation of production had as much of an impact on the metalware trades as

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<sup>42</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/1/40, Letter Book 1766-8, 'Letter Matthew Boulton to John Motteux', 23 February 1768, f. 62.

<sup>43</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/12, 'Copy Report on Sheffield & Birmingham Assay Office Petitions', 1773, f. 8.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

the numerous advances in technology.<sup>45</sup> It allowed producers to access skills that they did not possess, diversify their product range, and develop new products and materials. This study of the flexible organisation of production in the metalware trades builds upon recent research into the organisation of production, and demonstrates the importance of the circulation of producers between London and the expanding regional manufacturing towns of Birmingham and Sheffield.

### **4.3 The Movement of Patterns and Products**

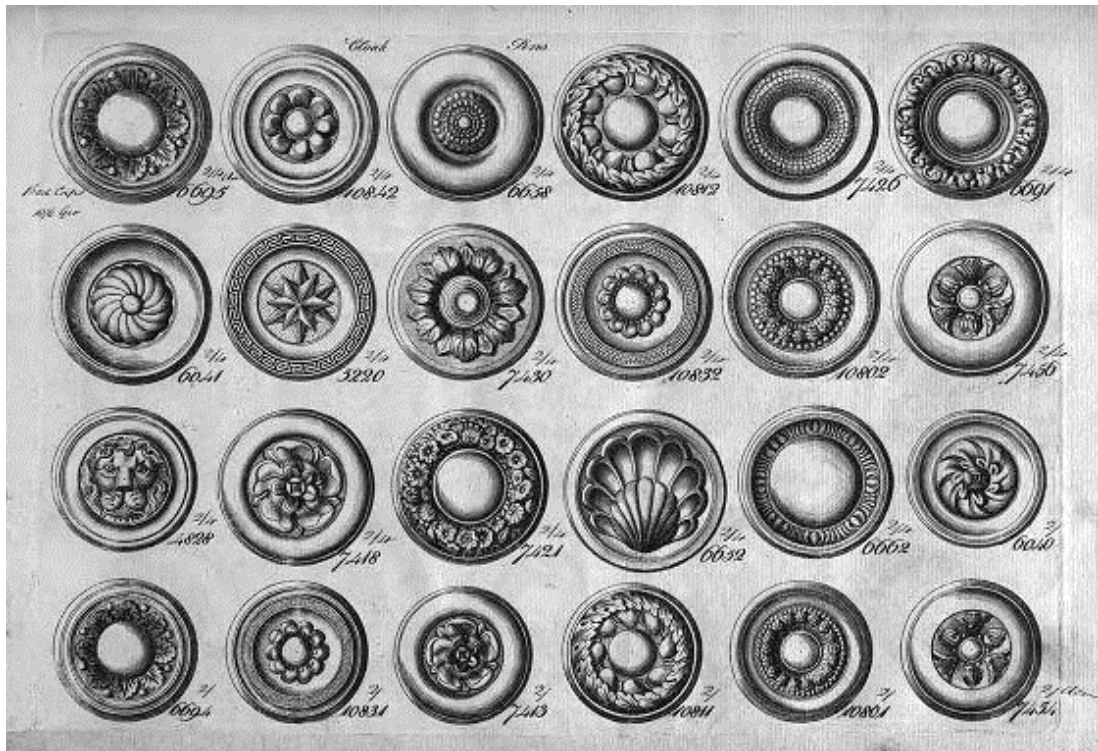
As a consequence of the movement of skilled and unskilled workers between Birmingham, Sheffield and London, there was also the movement of patterns, products and ideas. This again emphasises that each region cannot be seen in isolation. When innovations in design and technology were developed in one region, they often spread.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, although the regional manufacturing towns were at the forefront of the development of new products and materials, and quality metalware, they impacted upon the production and consumption of metalware in other regions. Producers used this circulation to their advantage as they developed new means with which they could sell their goods in different areas, for example with the development of pattern books and samples. Both were increasingly used by producers to circulate the designs of their products to guide subcontractors during the production process, attract new orders, and convey the quality and variety of their goods. These highly visual sources have captured the interest of historians of design and technology, who

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<sup>45</sup> Kristine Bruland, "Industrialisation and Technological Change," in *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain. Volume 1: Industrialisation, 1700-1860*, ed. Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 118.

<sup>46</sup> Clifford, "Concepts of Invention, Identity and Imitation," 241-255.

have begun to show their role in the dissemination of new patterns, designs and technologies; however, they can also be used to investigate the spread of ideas about the quality of metalware, and the increasing importance of variety and fashionability in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>47</sup>



**Figure 4.1: Birmingham Brass Catalogue, 1780, in T.R. Crom, *Trade Catalogues 1542-1842* (Melrose, 1989), 190.**

Pattern books were increasingly elaborate in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: they contained large numbers of different designs for each of the

<sup>47</sup> Pattern books were used by producers across the metalware trades, including those in Birmingham, Sheffield and London. They have been of interest to historians, for example, Eric Robinson, "Eighteenth-Century Commerce and Fashion: Matthew Boulton's Marketing Techniques," *Economic History Review* 16/1 (1963): 39-60; and Clifford, "Concepts of Invention, Identity and Imitation," 245. There were also numerous pattern books and books of samples that circulated in the textile trade. See, Miller, "Innovation and Industrial Espionage," 271-292.

products, or parts of the products, that were produced by a manufacturer. For example, a Birmingham brass catalogue (Figure 4.1) and Boulton's pattern book (Figure 4.2) contained numerous designs for buttons alongside candlesticks, spoons, salt dishes and tea urns.<sup>48</sup> Each of the detailed designs was labelled numerically, which made it easier to communicate and reference particular designs when making orders or compiling bills. Occasionally pattern books also contained other notes, such as their price, colour, or if parts of the product contained different materials such as glass. Often, pattern books did not specify the type of metal they were made with, but correspondence between producers and consumers suggests there was a degree of flexibility and choice. Boulton and Fothergill wrote to a consumer in 1771 to explain that 'you have here annex'd three sketches of buttons for your approbation if they are made in which solid silver' but can 'choose to have them made in thin rolld silver'.<sup>49</sup> Pattern books therefore reflected and encouraged a great degree of choice between different products, designs and materials. They were therefore popular devices for toy

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<sup>48</sup> Pattern books and catalogues both served the same function, and were used by producers who circulated them amongst retailers and consumers who would make their orders by requesting the different numbered designs. Pattern books were often collections of individual designs that were stuck into a book, whilst catalogues were more formalised publications of a producer's product range and were printed in larger quantities. However, in many cases, the difference simply reflected a shifting terminology, where what were once known as pattern books in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were increasingly called catalogues in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

<sup>49</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to Sir H. Harbord Bast', 26 September 1771. Sketches were more informal than pattern books, and would have been specific patterns drawn by hand rather than a full range of designs for the consumer to choose from. Nevertheless, they had the same function: they allowed the producer to confirm the design of a product and demonstrate their variety, and allowed the consumer to assess the quality and fashionability of a producer's designs.



makers in the metalware trade, whose flexible organisation of production allowed them to produce an increasing variety of products.<sup>50</sup>

The format of pattern books visually conveyed the variety and quality of metalware. Consumers, whether they were a retailer or merchant buying wholesale or a consumer ordering for themselves, were given control over their order, and could request alterations to particular designs or combine different parts of different patterns. The quality, variety and fashionability of the patterns was also conveyed through the language that discussed them in the adjoining correspondence between producer and consumer. According to one producer, 'the newest & best patterns are sent to London for exportation by many workmen', and that the London trade required 'the best and newest patterns'.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, Matthews, a customer of Boulton and Fothergill, was sent a letter, which 'inclos'd a card of the best women's steel chain we have by us', but they wrote that they 'wil send you some better as soon as we can'.<sup>52</sup> Patterns were assumed to be the best quality, but consumers could request lower quality, and cheaper, products if they desired. Boulton explained to Matthews that 'you also have a card of Soho buttons prized of the best quality but if you get any orders from that card you'll always mention to us whether we are to make the buttons of the best quality or of the mid or of the lowest quality'.<sup>53</sup> He outlined the discounts that would be

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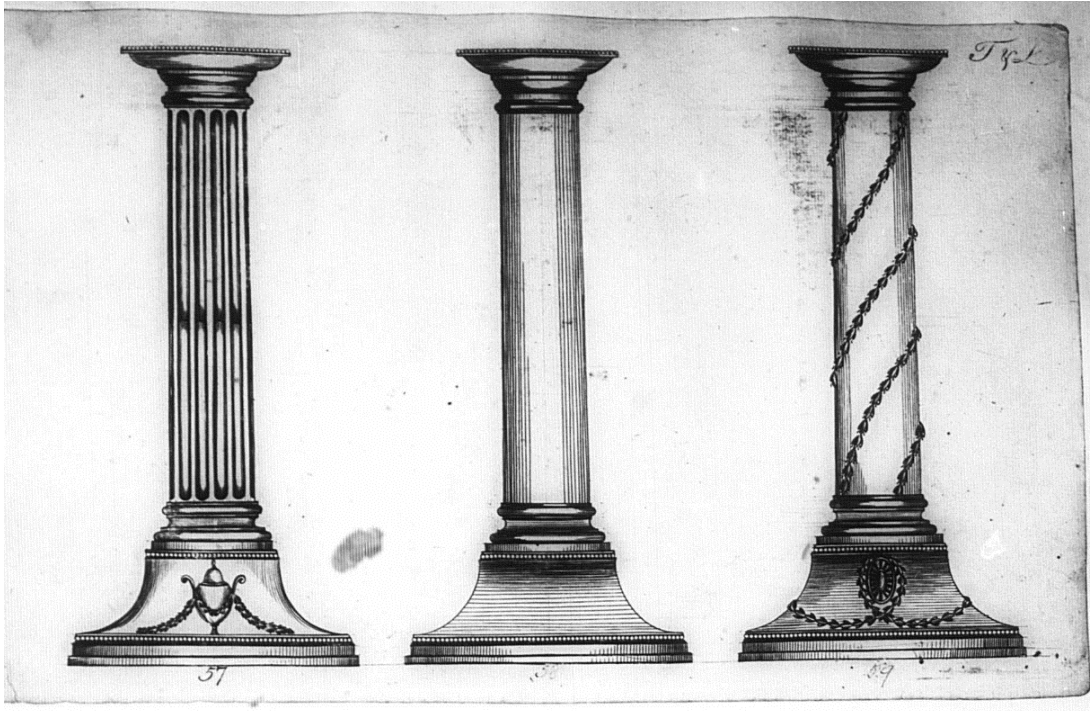
<sup>50</sup> Jones, *Industrial Enlightenment*, 45.

<sup>51</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/13, 'Reply of the Petitioners from Birmingham and Sheffield to the Cast of Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Plateworkers of the City of London and Places Adjacent', 8-9.

<sup>52</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to William Matthews', 13 July 1771.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 30 April 1772.

applied to products on a middle or low quality: ‘on the middle we allow 15 PCt & on the lowest 20 PCt’.



**Figure 4.2: Pattern Book 1, Boulton and Fothergill, Late-Eighteenth Century, Birmingham City Archives, Microfilm A621.1.**

Through the circulation of pattern books, producers were able to more efficiently trade with retailers, merchants and consumers from a distance.<sup>54</sup> The books themselves were often carried between towns by agents and travelling salesmen.<sup>55</sup> Alternatively, producers sent specific pages or patterns to potential consumers. A letter to John Wise from Boulton and Fothergill suggested that ‘we have neither any thing particularly new in the cand’l way, but will if you chuse it, send you the three pairs of the newest patterns’.<sup>56</sup> Letters between producers give a sense of how the pattern

<sup>54</sup> Julie Bellemare, “Design Books in the Chinese Taste: Marketing the Orient in England and France, 1688-1735,” *Journal of Design History* 27/1 (2014), 13.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/21/1, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1773, ‘Letter to John Wise’, 27 March 1773.

books travelled between regional manufacturing towns. James Wyatt wrote to William Matthews informing him that ‘by Saturdays waggon in a Box WM No 232 we forwarded pattern card as per annexd invoice, and shall proceed as fast as we can in compleating a sett of pattern cards of butt[on]s & every thing else that is yet wanting’.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, patterns could be easily and efficiently circulated through intermediaries, alongside products by coach, or with letters and other correspondence.

Patterns were also circulated between producers and subcontractors to ensure the consistency and accuracy of metal goods. Producers provided subcontractors with patterns to work from, so that ‘he will have drawings of every particular made out for him, all that will be required of him will be to work from the drawings’.<sup>58</sup> This communication was necessary so that the manufacturer could trust the subcontractor to complete their work to the correct specification and quality.<sup>59</sup> It was especially important when work was commissioned or subcontracted from a distance, for example when producers in London subcontracted work in Birmingham or Sheffield. John Parsons, a silver candlestick manufacturer in Sheffield explained that ‘the candlesticks which [he] the witness makes for the silversmiths in London are made according to the instructions he receives, and that sometimes they send their own models & drawings’.<sup>60</sup> However, he clarifies that ‘the silver is his own’, which

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<sup>57</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, ‘Letter to William Matthews’, 18 February 1771.

<sup>58</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/19/2, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1770, ‘Letter from Duke of Richmond’, 3 April 1770.

<sup>59</sup> Charles Saumarez Smith, *The Rise of Design: Design and the Domestic Interior in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Pimlico, 2000), 8.

<sup>60</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/12, ‘Copy Report on Sheffield and Birmingham Assay Office Petitions’, f. 3. Parsons is likely referring to designs from pattern books or technical drawings.

suggests that the responsibility for the aesthetic design, and intrinsic quality of products was often divided across different regions.<sup>61</sup> There was also the sharing of tools and technology. In particular, die stamps, which were created from the designs seen in the pattern books, were re-used and shared between networks of producers because they were expensive to produce.<sup>62</sup> Therefore the relationship between producer and subcontractor, or producer and consumer, was often collaborative, and involved the exchange of skill, materials, tools and designs.

In addition to the circulation of pattern books, there was also the circulation of products and samples of metalware. This was another consequence of the flexible organisation of production, which meant that products regularly circulated between producers, subcontractors and retailers. Samples of metal goods, like the card of buttons in Figure 4.3, were also used in a similar way to pattern books to demonstrate the variety and quality of a manufacturer's products. It allowed the consumer to assess the producer's workmanship, as well as the fashionability and intrinsic value of the materials.<sup>63</sup> This further emphasises that there was the movement of people, products and processes between Birmingham, Sheffield and London.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, ff. 6-7.

<sup>62</sup> Molly Pearce, Marilyn Duerden and John Bartlett, *Sheffield Silver 1773-1973* (Sheffield: Sheffield City Museum, 1973), 13.

<sup>63</sup> As shown in chapter 8 of this thesis, consumers possessed the knowledge to inspect metalware and were able to assess its quality and fashionability.



**Figure 4.3: Card of 17 Buttons, c. 1800, The National Archives, EXT 11/19.**

The circulation of samples was not unique to the metalware trade, and also occurred in the textile trade with the circulation of swatches of fabric inside pattern books.<sup>64</sup> However, the circulation of samples of metalware has received less historical attention than metalware pattern books, or textile samples. This practice was particularly risky and costly with the movement of samples of metalware. Samples of metal goods were sent at a high risk because of the intrinsic value and cost of the sample, and there was no guarantee that it would be returned to the producer, or that products would be purchased. Therefore, producers were increasingly reluctant to give their consumers metal goods of a high value on credit before receiving payment. There was also the danger that new designs might be stolen. Nevertheless, samples were

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<sup>64</sup> Miller, "Innovation and Industrial Espionage," 271-292.

often sent to consumers in conjunction with patterns, once they had shown interest in a particular product or design. Boulton wrote to Nathaniel Jeffrys, offering to send a sample of metalware after he had seen a pattern for a chain, asking: ‘pray what have you done wth ye drawing for ye queens chain we should be glad to receive it wth your remarks & yr order for one wch will give us an opportunity of sheweing a specimen of our best work’.<sup>65</sup> Like pattern books, samples were used to open communication between producer and consumer, to negotiate the design, quality and cost of metal goods.

Samples of metalware were therefore used to entice orders, by reassuring the consumer of their quality and variety. Samples could also be used to help the customer decide which type of metal they wanted their products to be made with. John Scale explained to Boulton that ‘I shewd Mr Ingram the metal bottoms to the gilt and plated buttons which he lik'd very much... have now sent you 3 steel Buttons as samples & Shall send you compleat cards of gilt plated & platina & Steel’.<sup>66</sup> Buttons were especially effective in demonstrating their quality and variety, and could be easily circulated on cards, as seen by a card of 17 buttons produced in Birmingham at the end of the eighteenth century (Figure 4.3). They visually displayed a range of designs like the buttons depicted in the pattern book shown in Figure 4.1, however samples made it easier to see the workmanship and different materials, textures and techniques.

As the metalware trade expanded in the eighteenth century, the circulation of pattern books and samples encouraged long-distance trade, which led to the regular movement of products between Birmingham, Sheffield and London. Many of the

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<sup>65</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/1/7, Letter Book 1766-8, ‘Letter Matthew Boulton to Nathaniel Jeffrys’, f. 9.

<sup>66</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/72/4, ‘Letter John Scale to Matthew Boulton’, 28 January 1773.

potential consumers for the regional metal goods were in London, where ‘vast quantities of plate is sold... that is manufactured at Sheffield and Birmingham’.<sup>67</sup> These were either sent directly to the consumer, or to a range of warehouses, agents or retailers. James Wyatt wrote to Matthews in 1771, informing him that ‘with this you’ll receive some steel buttons with invoice for Mr Robt Gray wch you will be pleased to deliver also a parcel from the Birm’m warehouse for Mr Brown’.<sup>68</sup> Products were often transported by merchants, who acted as middle-men in the retailing of metalware from the regional manufacturing towns, such as the Birmingham merchants Hobday, Biddle and Ryder, who traded at the end of the eighteenth century. Their trade card (Figure 4.4) featured a panoramic view of Birmingham in the background of the card, with a number of packages and barrels in the foreground, one of which was labelled ‘London’. This suggests that many producers, merchants and manufacturers profited from the movement of products between the regional manufacturing towns and London. The expanding export trade of metalware produced in Birmingham and Sheffield also led to the wider movement of products, which were often sent to London or Bristol so that they could be exported. Plate that was exported to Europe often travelled to London first, of which about two thirds were unfinished and were sent to London to be burnished, polished, and marked at Goldsmiths’ Hall.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/12, ‘Copy Report on Sheffield & Birmingham Assay Office Petitions’, f. 17.

<sup>68</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, ‘Letter to William Matthews’, 15 May 1771.

<sup>69</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/12, ‘Committee on Petitions Relating to Assaying Plate’, 18 February 1773, f. 8.



**Figure 4.4: Trade Card of Hobday, Biddle and Ryder, c. 1750-1800, Victoria and Albert Museum, E.46-1949.**

The movement of people and products between Birmingham, Sheffield and London, therefore led to the spread of new products and designs, as well as debates about quality. Although historians have often separated their discussion of the metalware trade in London, and those in the regional manufacturing towns, Helen Clifford has demonstrated the movement of innovations in technology between these areas.<sup>70</sup> Producers learnt their trade by working alongside each other, through ‘observation and repetitive bodily experience’.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, knowledge was more quickly shared in large scale businesses that involved a large number of producers and subcontractors, and thrived with the flexible organisation of production and the

<sup>70</sup> Clifford, “Concepts of Invention, Identity and Imitation,” 241-255.

<sup>71</sup> Pamela H. Smith, “Making and Knowing: Craft as Natural Philosophy,” in *Ways of Making and Knowing: The Material Culture of Empirical Knowledge*, ed. Pamela H. Smith, Amy R.W. Meyers and Harold J. Cook (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 19.



emergence of manufactories.<sup>72</sup> This movement of ideas between producers was commonly known, and was referenced in John Dyer's poem *The Fleece*, published in 1757. Although the poem focused upon wool manufacturing, it spoke about production and trade more broadly:

Toil only tastes the feast, by nerveless ease  
Unrelish'd. Various mirth and song resound;  
And oft they interpose improving talk,  
Divulging to each other knowledge rare,  
Sparks, from experience, that sometimes arise;  
Till night weighs down the sense, or morning's dawn  
Rouses to labor, man to labor born.<sup>73</sup>

The poem emphasises the way in which knowledge was passed between producers, and innovations were developed through 'improving talk' and 'experience'. Innovations in production and technology also spread across wider distances through letters.<sup>74</sup> Boulton wrote to a producer in Paris, writing that he had 'paid a guinea to your friend in the garrett for teaching me to boyl brass work en couleur' but that he did 'wish I had the best workmen in Paris'.<sup>75</sup> The increased correspondence, and

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<sup>72</sup> S.R. Epstein "Transferring Technical Knowledge and Innovating in Europe, c.1200-c.1800," in *Technology, Skills and the Pre-Modern Economy in the East and the West*, ed. Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten Van Zanden (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 52.

<sup>73</sup> John Dyer, *The Fleece*, (London: Printed for R and J Dodsley, 1757), 74-75.

<sup>74</sup> As discussed further in chapter 3.

<sup>75</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/2/13, Letter Book 1768-73, 'Letter Matthew Boulton to Mr Solomon Hymen', 23 January 1769, f. 15.

movement of producers and patterns between manufacturing towns therefore inevitably led to the exchange of designs and technologies. This brought many advantages to those producers, retailers and consumers who gained new skills, which improved the quality and variety of products across Birmingham, Sheffield and London.<sup>76</sup>

The movement of products and designs was a concern to producers who wished to protect their innovations. The expansion of the trade occurred in parallel with an increasing awareness of intellectual property from the late-seventeenth century, and so the movement of products caused concern about the theft of ideas. Patents were increasingly used in an attempt to protect designs and innovations.<sup>77</sup> Of 102 patents taken out in Birmingham between 1680 and 1800, 75 percent were related to the metalware and engine-making trades, as were 63 percent of Sheffield's patents.<sup>78</sup> Patents were rarely enforced and carried limited legal protection. Instead, they tended to be used for marketing purposes to emphasise innovation and intellectual property.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, there was an increasing desire to protect designs and

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<sup>76</sup> Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, "Technology as a Public Culture in the Eighteenth Century: The Artisans' Legacy," *History of Science* 45/2 (2007), 137; and Hilaire-Pérez and Verna, "Dissemination of Technical Knowledge," 538, 544.

<sup>77</sup> Sean Bottomley, *The British Patent System During the Industrial Revolution 1700-1851: From Privilege to Property* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); and Christine MacLeod, *Inventing the Industrial Revolution: The English Patent System, 1660-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>78</sup> Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in the Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 178; see also, Maxine Berg, "From Imitation to Invention: Creating Commodities in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Economic History Review* 55/1 (2002), especially 17-25.

<sup>79</sup> For more about references to innovation and patents in the marketing of metalware, see chapter 6 of this thesis.

innovations. Producers saw that they needed to distinguish themselves from their competitors to gain full advantage from their new products and designs, which they had often invested time and money in. Product variety and quality was highly valued by consumers, and so producers needed to preserve their advantage in these areas.

Producers had to balance the advantage that they gained from the movement of producers and exchange of ideas, with the risk they made by circulating their own workers, designs and innovations. Where it was not possible to invest in a patent, producers tried to control the spread of new production methods, by selecting who they wished to share information with. Boulton was willing to share a new method of getting impressions from gold boxes in the ‘best and cheapest way’, but resolved to communicate the method in person rather than write it in a letter. He wrote: ‘when I see you at Soho I will teach you how to take ye impressions your self wch will prevent your exposing your scheme to another’.<sup>80</sup> Manufacturers also tried to prevent the movement of skilled producers abroad, which could threaten the national metalware trade. Boulton and Garbett complained that ‘these persons passing backwards and forwards have opportunity of seducing other workmen and of carrying away manufactures in part finished, which they go and finish in France, and of discovering such improvements as are daily making in our manufactures’.<sup>81</sup> There was also the specific criticism about the lack of secrecy of patents that were entered in the patent office, which could be easily accessed and copied. Boulton and Garbett explained that ‘these people also go to the patent office and there take out copies of the specifications;

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<sup>80</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/2/13, Letter Book 1768-73, ‘Letter from Matthew Boulton to Mr Solomon Hymen’.

<sup>81</sup> British Library, Add MS 34462, Auckland Papers, Vol LI., ‘Evidence for a Commercial Treaty with France’, 1786, ff. 107-108. See also, Harris, *Industrial Espionage and Technological Transfer*, 8.

and by this means discover the inventions we make from time to time'.<sup>82</sup> It was this poor protection of patents and inventions that 'deterred foreigners from coming and establishing themselves here, and has induced them to carry these inventions to other countries, where the secret of such inventions is better kept, and the property in the same better guarded'.<sup>83</sup>

The circulation of patterns was a particular concern to producers, who wanted to protect the originality and novelty of their designs.<sup>84</sup> Patterns were sent directly to the producer or consumer, but there was a greater danger of them being exposed to the public if they were attached to the outside of packages. When questioning regional producers during the negotiation for the opening of new Assay Offices in Birmingham and Sheffield, one producer was questioned, 'is there not a pattern B tied of the outside of each package?'.<sup>85</sup> He replied by explaining that this was a common practice, but that it was for products that were 'not of the best work'. This suggests that the most valuable designs were protected, and producers sought to prevent their exposure to others who might copy them. In order to ensure their secrecy, some producers protected their patterns and asked potential customers to travel to view them, rather than sending them to the customer. One producer 'frequently' saw 'a Birmingham

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<sup>82</sup> British Library, Add MS 34462, Auckland Papers, Vol LI., 'Evidence for a Commercial Treaty with France', 1786, ff. 107-108.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> As shown in chapter 7 of this thesis, the importance of secrecy also emerged in the design of retail premises, in which some producers sought to hide their products from public view to prevent the theft of new designs and patterns. For literature on the role of secrecy, see Hilaire-Pérez and Verna, "Dissemination of Technical Knowledge," 536-565.

<sup>85</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/13, 'Reply of the Petitioners from Birmingham and Sheffield to the Cast of Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Plateworkers of the City of London and Places Adjacent', ff. 8-9.

Man come up to London to see patterns'.<sup>86</sup> For example, Boulton asked a customer to 'go to our agent Mr Matthews No 14 Cannon Street who will shew you cards of plated butt & c. by which you may make ye orders more intelligable & explicit & prevent the danger of mistakes'.<sup>87</sup> In light of the movement of producers, products and designs between Birmingham, Sheffield and London, and beyond, producers therefore sought new ways of balancing the beneficial exchange of skills and expertise with other producers and communication with potential consumers, whilst also protecting the variety, quality and novelty of their products.

#### **4.4 Producing Quality**

It was difficult to regulate the expanding range of producers, products and places using the formal systems of regulation.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, statutory laws and guild ordinances had to adapt to include the broadening spaces of production, and were extended to regulate 'all and every the journeymen apprentices and servants all and every the metals wares works and workmanship of all and every person and persons whatsoever making selling or working or who shall hereafter make sell or work any manner of wares or stuff'.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, producers developed additional methods of quality control. The flexible organisation of production was dependent upon the need to trust subcontractors and journeymen, and adequately monitor their work, or it had the

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, f. 10.

<sup>87</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to Bustamants & Co.', 3 January 1770.

<sup>88</sup> See the discussion of the regulation of the trade in chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis.

<sup>89</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07118, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'By-Laws Approved Office Copy', 1766, ff. 55-56.

potential to reduce the quality of metalware. Some historians therefore suggest that the flexible organisation of production benefited the firm because it encouraged the quality of the product to be checked at each stage of the production process, which made quality control more effective.<sup>90</sup>

Manufacturers debated whether their use of subcontracting and a flexible organisation of production positively or negatively impacted upon the quality of their products. In 1773, John Scale argued that the expansion of the trade and the development of larger workshops meant that ‘so many work people by the day for in such an overgrown manufactory as this that consists of such a variety of articles it is impossible for the Masters to inspect into each trade so minutely as is necessary’.<sup>91</sup> Scale argued that the regulation of the trade had a limited impact, and suggested that ‘all the laws or rules that ever was or ever will be made will never make the men do that justice to their Masters as they woud do to themselves’.<sup>92</sup> He suggested that subcontracting and piece work led to a greater effort from workers, and a higher quality of production, so he would ‘recommend to get every person about the manufactory to piece work... and to find all their own materials of whatever kind, and also tools of all kinds except Stamps Lathes & presses &c which they shoud pay intrest for’.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, the use of subcontracting could be recommended, as long as ‘the

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<sup>90</sup> For example, see: Ulrich Pfister, “Craft Guilds, the Theory of the Firm, and Early Modern Proto-industry,” in *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy, 1400-1800*, ed. S.R. Epstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 25.

<sup>91</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/72/118, ‘Memorandum by John Scale’, 1773.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

chief care of the conductor would be to examine the quality of the goods, and to keep up the spirit of the trade by novelty and executing the orders to the time promised'.<sup>94</sup>

Producers therefore ensured that they trusted in, and tested, the quality of products sourced from subcontractors and suppliers. This was particularly important when acquiring raw materials. Boulton, for example, purchased lead from the merchants Smith and Thomas in Bristol, and copper from Robert and Rotton in Duffield near Derby. John Scale wrote to the suppliers on behalf of Boulton to 'beg you will be carefull of the quality'.<sup>95</sup> Samples were also used to test quality. They were sent between producers, who could inspect the quality for themselves, or get it tested by other people. William Allen wrote to Boulton to inform him that he had received a sample of iron from the manufacturers Barclay and Sons, and had enquired about its quality by giving 'Mr. Capel Hanbury a piece of it, who sent it down to an old man in Worcestershire, who he said could try the qualitys of iron as well as any man in England'.<sup>96</sup> However, in order to determine whether the iron would make good-quality steel, Hanbury advised Allen to show the sample to 'Mr. Sevigni, a famous cutler in Pall Mall, to whom I delivered a piece of the iron, who informs me that it is the best iron he ever met with, that it has all the properties that the best iron can have: that it will make excellent steel, is very ductile and malleable, and at the same time is of a very strong body'.<sup>97</sup> Different individuals therefore developed their reputation for their

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/21/1, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1773, 'Letter to Messrs Robert & Rotton', May 1772; and Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/21/1, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1773, 'Letter to Messrs Smith & Thomas Merchants', 20 April 1773.

<sup>96</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/23/33, General Correspondence 1750-1773, 'Letter William Allen to Matthew Boulton', 2 April 1764.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

ability to assess the quality of metal goods. Consequently, the circulation of samples could be used to guarantee the intrinsic quality of metalware.

The more people that were involved in the process, necessitated that more people needed to be trusted to undertake work with a high quality of workmanship, and with no attempts at fraudulent behaviour.<sup>98</sup> Producers were frustrated that there were ‘no proper checks upon their servants to prevent abuses arising either from their villainy or ignorance’.<sup>99</sup> Although employees who worked under the same roof still had the potential to produce substandard work, it was more difficult to manage when they were in different buildings or different regions. Not least, they had to be trusted not to steal tools, materials and products. This was a common problem, for example in 1755, when Robert Phipps was found guilty of the theft of twelve pewter plates, whilst working as a journeyman for Richard Cleeve.<sup>100</sup> Legally, the embezzlement or theft of goods by subcontractors and workers outside the main place of production was more complex than if it was under the same roof as the owner.<sup>101</sup> It was more difficult to prove that goods had been stolen rather than given, and so prosecutions were often unsuccessful or resulted in lesser punishments. However, these laws changed in the

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<sup>98</sup> John Styles, “Embezzlement, Industry and the Law in England, 1500-1800,” in *Manufacture in Town and Country before the Factory*, ed. Maxine Berg, Pat Hudson and Michael Sonenscher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 174; and Riello, “Strategies and Boundaries,” 259-260.

<sup>99</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/42, ‘Letter Samuel Garbett to Matthew Boulton’, 25 May 1773, f. 1.

<sup>100</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, 16 January 1755, trial of Robert Phipps (t17550116-3).

<sup>101</sup> Craig Becker, “Property in the Workplace: Labor, Capital and Crime in the Eighteenth-Century British Woolen and Worsted Industry,” *Virginia Law Review* 69/8 (1983): 1487-1515; and John Styles, “Spinners and the Law: Regulating Yarn Standards in the English Worsted Industries, 1550-1800,” *Textile History* 44/2 (2013), 145.



eighteenth century in response to the changing organisation of production, in order to better protect the property rights of the producer.

Subcontractors were increasingly blamed by producers for delays to their customer's orders, or for poor-quality products. Samuel Garbett described the uncertainty producers in Birmingham felt when they had to rely upon agents in London to get their silverware assayed, and explained that 'when we send things to London we can't depend upon the person's taking the goods to the hall immediately - sometimes not for a day or two'.<sup>102</sup> In 1761, John Boulton wrote to a consumer to apologise for a delay and the way in which they might 'have give you room for to think we have bin neglectful in the execution of your last orders', but that it had been a servant who had produced and packaged the wrong order.<sup>103</sup> In response, Boulton offered to send some of his latest pattern cards, thus highlighting how customer relations were crucial, as was the maintenance of trust and reliability. However, it is difficult to determine whether subcontractors were unreliable and had a detrimental effect on business, or whether it was simply used as an excuse by manufacturers who failed to meet consumer orders.

On occasion, the quality and the workmanship of subcontracted products was called into question. John Scale explained in length that the delay to an order of a coffee pot was because it 'was only finishd from Dumee yesterday, after which Duval had the handle to solder on and a piece in each hand of the figures where Dumee had

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<sup>102</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/13, 'Reply of the Petitioners from Birmingham and Sheffield to the Cast of the Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Plateworkers of the City of London and Places Adjacent', f. 7.

<sup>103</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 49/2, 'Letter John Boulton to Matthew Boulton', 10 August 1761, f. 1.

made a blunder in the chasing'.<sup>104</sup> He concluded that the '2 figures are so badly done... the cover was not made, the ground work is very rough and cou'd not have been boild white; so that upon the whole the appearance of it in its present condition wou'd not answer so good a purpose as the drawing'.<sup>105</sup> Another order for a pair of earrings was not completed at all because they had 'been disappointed in the opinion we had of the workman we in trusted with the making of them'.<sup>106</sup> These instances did not necessarily result in the cancellation of subcontracting arrangements. Boulton and Fothergill wrote to Charles and Luke Procter to order a dozen scissor knives, but specified that 'they must be neat and much better than this pattern which is done very badly and consequently no ways saleable'.<sup>107</sup> However, in other cases, especially when there had been a customer complaint, they ended relationships with particular subcontractors who had provided lower quality metalware. Lord Cranbourne was reassured that 'we are very much concerned at the complaints your Lordship make respecting the all steel buttons we sent these afford us an additional proof... of the people we have hitherto entrusted with the management of the steel goods of our manufactory and strength the reason we have for taking that branch out of their hands and controlling it to such as we flatter ourselves will afford us more satisfaction'.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/72/3, 'Letter John Scale to Matthew Boulton', 23 January 1773.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to Jos Banks'.

<sup>107</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/21/1, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1773, 'Letter to Charles & Luke Procter', 15 April 1773.

<sup>108</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to the Right Hon'ble Lord Cranborne', 19 January 1773.

The flexible organisation of production could therefore be used to change or keep subcontractors depending on the need for their skills, or the worker's quality.

## **Conclusion**

The expansion of the metalware trade in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, therefore led to the increasing movement of people, products and processes between Birmingham, Sheffield and London. This impacted on the production of quality metalware. The movement of producers and the shared labour, tools and technologies, increased their capacity to innovate, and ensured the spread of desirable skills that was fundamental to the production of new products and materials.<sup>109</sup> This allowed manufacturers to produce a wider variety of products, and respond quickly to new fashions. Manufacturers, especially within the toy trade, capitalised on this, by investing in the circulation of pattern books and samples, which enhanced the quality and variety of their products. Moreover, they improved the quality of metal goods because they allowed subcontractors to be more carefully instructed with patterns, and the circulation of samples encouraged the assessment of the intrinsic quality and workmanship. It is therefore crucial to consider the metalware trade in a state of flux, in which neither Birmingham, Sheffield or London can be seen in isolation, but instead interacted through the movement of people, products and processes.

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<sup>109</sup> Berg, "Product Innovation in Core Consumer Industries," 139.

## Chapter 5.

### **The Importance of Reputation: Manipulating Consumer Demand and the Regulation of the Trade**

As the metalware trade expanded and competition between producers, retailers and regional manufacturing towns grew, debates about product quality thrived in the public sphere. The previous chapters of this thesis emphasised that debates about quality focused on the quality of people, processes and products. This chapter shows that reputation was deeply intertwined with these debates. Metalware was not just defined by its physical and material properties, but was also determined by intangible qualities, such as the reputation of individual producers, of collective regulatory institutions, and of places of manufacture.

Reputation is largely subjective, and therefore it is influenced by cultural values.<sup>1</sup> The relevant literature has focused upon a producer or retailer's reputation for honesty and trust.<sup>2</sup> This chapter builds upon this literature by looking instead at the reputation for quality production. As this chapter shows, reputation was a crucial part of the deliberation of quality, and could be manipulated by different agents such as the guilds and the state, producers and retailers, and consumers. Reputation could be

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<sup>1</sup> Christine MacLeod, *Heroes of Invention: Technology, Liberalism and British Identity, 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 25.

<sup>2</sup> Avner Greif, "Reputation and Coalitions in Medieval Trade: Evidence on the Maghribi Traders," *Journal of Economic History* 49/4 (1989), 866-867; Natasha Glaisyer, "Calculating Credibility: Print Culture, Trust and Economic Figures in Early Eighteenth-Century England," *Economic History Review*, 60/4 (2007): 685-711; and Tawny Paul, "Credit, Reputation, and Masculinity in British Urban Commerce: Edinburgh, c.1710-70," *Economic History Review*, 66/1 (2013): 226-248.

developed through the marks on objects, including sponsors' marks, hallmarks, and geographic marks, but also by word-of-mouth, debates in Parliament, and the dissemination of information in newspapers. The reputation of individuals or groups of producers had a significant and practical impact on the metalware trade. Reputation could affect which producers and regional manufacturing towns were perceived as producing quality metalware, and so increase their popularity, and thus their sales and profits. Reputation also materially improved product quality, and contributed to the regulation of the trade because producers had the incentive to establish and maintain their product quality and good reputation.<sup>3</sup>

This discussion of individual and collective reputation also draws upon scholarship on branding, which demonstrates how quality could be linked to a particular producer, product, or mark on an object.<sup>4</sup> Recent literature about the branding of early modern consumer goods has focused on the marking of medicines and ceramics, and has brought together a discussion of individual and collective marks.<sup>5</sup> Historians such as Bert De Munck have demonstrated the socio-political function that branding served, that allowed individuals to benefit from the political capital that institutions possessed; however, these studies have often neglected the

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz, "The Causes and Consequences of the Dependence of Quality on Price," *American Economic Association* 25/1 (1987), 23.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Moore and Susan Reid, "The Birth of a Brand: 4000 years of Branding," *Business History* 50/4 (2008): 419-432; and Andrew Bevan and David Wengrow, eds., *Cultures of Commodity Branding* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Basford, "A Commodity of Good Names: The Branding of Products, c.1650-1900," Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of York, 2012; and John Styles, "Product Innovation in Early Modern London," *Past & Present* 168 (2000): 124-169.

objects themselves.<sup>6</sup> Much of this literature argues for a separation between informative marks, signalling the geographic origin of an object or its quality, and ‘modern brands’, that establish reputation and convey ‘brand personality’.<sup>7</sup> By looking more closely at the objects themselves, and placing the discussion of branding more firmly within the contemporary context in which the objects in question circulated, it is possible to get a better insight into the role of reputation and the marking of objects in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century metalware trades. As this chapter shows, the marks on objects facilitated the circulation of reputation, and were also used to improve the reputation of the metalware trade by allowing the better regulation of quality.

This chapter explores the importance of reputation in debates about the quality of products, and considers its role firstly in the regulation of the trade, and then its use by producers, and circulation amongst consumers and the public. It begins by distinguishing between individual and collective reputation, and explores the impact that these had on the regulation of the trade and the shifting reputation of manufacturing towns. The chapter then analyses the debates leading up to the opening of the new Assay Offices in Birmingham and Sheffield in 1773, which works as an

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<sup>6</sup> Bert De Munck, “The Agency of Branding and the Location of Value: Hallmarks and Monograms in Early Modern Tableware Industries,” *Business History* 54/7 (2012): 1055-1076. See also Gary Richardson, “Brand Names before the Industrial Revolution,” *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper*, No 13930 (2008); and Catherine Casson, “Reputation and Responsibility in Medieval English Towns: Civic Concerns with the Regulation of the Trade,” *Urban History* 39/3 (2012): 387-408.

<sup>7</sup> De Munck, “The Agency of Branding and the Location of Value,” 1055; and Ilja Van Damme, “From a ‘Knowledgeable’ Salesman towards a ‘Recognizable’ Product? Questioning Branding Strategies before Industrialization (Antwerp, Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries),” in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture, 1500-1900*, ed. Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 77.

effective case study to understand the role of reputation in the metalware trades. The petitions for and against their opening, by the Birmingham and Sheffield producers and the London goldsmiths respectively, did not just emphasise the importance of a producer's ability to produce quality metalware, but also their trustworthiness and reputation. As this chapter demonstrates, individual producers and groups of producers manipulated their public image, and consequently the perception of quality metalware.

### **5.1 Individual and Collective Reputation**

The literature on reputation has distinguished between the reputation of individual producers, and that of groups of producers on a regional or national level.<sup>8</sup> Each type of reputation had a different dimension: while national reputation benefited the trade as a whole, different regional reputations often benefited clusters of producers to the detriment of others.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, both individual and collective reputation could influence the perception of quality metalware. In particular, it was the marks on metalware that could be used to distinguish between similar products with different prices, designs and workmanship.<sup>10</sup> Marks, such as sponsors' marks and geographic marks, were used to identify details about the origin and production of particular objects, and in doing so were able to convey messages about quality, and could be

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Casson and Nigel Wadeson, "Export Performance and Reputation," in *Trademarks, Brands, and Competitiveness*, ed. Teresa Da Silva Lopes and Paul Duguid (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010): 31-54.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid; and Mark Casson, "An Economic Approach to Regional Business Networks," in *Industrial Clusters and Regional Business Networks in England, 1750-1970*, ed. John F. Wilson and Andrew Popp (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 30.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Popp, "Barriers to Innovation in Marketing in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: Merchant-Manufacturer Relationships," *Business History* 44/2 (2002), 26.

used as a guarantee for consumers and a way in which producers could market their products.<sup>11</sup> Many consumer goods, from furniture and clothing, to tableware and ceramics, were applied with a series of marks throughout their life-cycle.<sup>12</sup> The ‘surfacescape’ of an object could be used by different agents: regulators applied marks of quality; producers added their sponsors’ marks, as did retailers and agents; there were marks identifying the location of production; and after purchase consumers often applied their marks of ownership.<sup>13</sup> These marks have increasingly attracted the attention of scholars across disciplines.<sup>14</sup> However, the function and audience of these marks, and their relationship with reputation, remains under-explored.

Collective marks were often associated with the regulation of the trade.<sup>15</sup> These included many of the marks discussed in chapter 1, notably hallmarks on silver, quality marks on pewter, geographic marks, and excise marks, which represented the

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<sup>11</sup> Jane C. Ginsburg, “See me, Feel me, Touch me, Hear me (and maybe Smell and Taste me too): I am a Trademark - a US perspective,” in *Trade Marks and Brands: An Interdisciplinary Critique*, ed. Lionel Bently, Jennifer Davis and Jane C. Ginsburg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 93; and Styles, “Product Innovation,” 132.

<sup>12</sup> Christof Jeggle, “Labelling with Numbers? Weavers, Merchants and the Valuation of Linen in Seventeenth Century Munster,” in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture, 1500-1900*, ed. Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 33.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces: The Decorative Object in Early Modern China* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 203.

<sup>14</sup> Basford, “A Commodity of Good Names”; Adam Bowett and Laurie Lindey, “Labelled Furniture from the White Swan Workshop in St Paul’s Churchyard,” *Furniture History* 39 (2003): 71-98; David Higgins and Geoffrey Tweedale, “Asset or Liability? Trade Marks in the Sheffield Cutlery and Tool Trades,” *Business History* 37/3 (1995): 1-27; and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> Bert De Munck, “Artisans, Products and Gifts: Rethinking the History of Material Culture in Early Modern Europe,” *Past & Present* 224 (2014), 66.



collective institutions of the guilds and state who managed their regulation.<sup>16</sup> They were recognised nationally and internationally as certifiers of quality, and capitalised on the political standing and reputation of the guilds.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, marks were able to reassure those who encountered an object, whether producers, retailers or consumers, of its quality and intrinsic value.<sup>18</sup>

Individual marks were understood by contemporaries to reflect the work of a producer, partnership, or firm rather than a regulatory body such as the guild or Assay Office. When asked if the sponsor's mark on silver was 'understood to be his own mark or the mark at the hall', John Wakelin, a London silversmith, replied that it was 'generally understood to be his own work'.<sup>19</sup> Individual marks did not just represent the work of the named producers, but larger workshops and subcontractors, who all contributed to the production of a single product.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the same individual mark could be transferred between family members and other individuals. When John Wingod was found guilty of producing pewter goods of a poor quality, his wife Jane Wingod, who was also a pewterer in London, attended the court to defend the quality

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<sup>16</sup> William J. Ashworth, "Quality and the Roots of Manufacturing 'Expertise' in Eighteenth Century Britain," *Osiris* 25/1 (2010), 244.

<sup>17</sup> De Munck, "The Agency of Branding," 1055; Richardson, "Brand Names before the Industrial Revolution," 18.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Bettoni, "Usefulness, Ornamental Function and Novelty: Debates on Quality in Button and Buckle Manufacturing in Northern Italy (Eighteenth to Nineteenth Centuries)," in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture, 1500-1900*, ed. Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 173.

<sup>19</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/15, 'Committee of Sheffield Assay Petitioners', 26 February 1773, f. 16.

<sup>20</sup> The organisation of production within the metalware trade is outlined in chapters 3 and 4. See also, Helen Clifford, *Silver in London: The Parker and Wakelin Partnership 1760-1776* (London: Yale University Press, 2004), 9.

of her goods and request permission to strike her husband's touch.<sup>21</sup> These are described as 'sponsors' marks' in recent literature, rather than 'producers' marks' to better encompass their symbolic and practical role.<sup>22</sup>

In some parts of the metalware trade, individual marks were also regulated by guilds, notably within the silver and pewter trades.<sup>23</sup> Producers within these trades were required to register their marks with the guilds and mark their goods with their individual marks. For example, the mark of Thomas Bancks can be seen on a pewter waiter (Figure 5.1). Pewterers who did not mark their goods faced a fine of one penny per pound weight of pewter, enforced by the Worshipful Company of Pewterers.<sup>24</sup> Sponsors' marks similarly needed to be approved and registered within the silver trade, by the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths or the regional Assay Offices. Producers of silver plate had to register 'every such surname, or name, or firm... shall be in plain and legible characters, and struck with one punch only', which cost 'the sum of two shillings and sixpence, and no more'.<sup>25</sup> By requiring producers to register their marks, the guilds aimed to identify those responsible for poor-quality metalware, and so improve the quality of the trade.

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<sup>21</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07104/25, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Rough Court Minutes 1764-1768', 17 March 1768.

<sup>22</sup> Ellenor Alcorn, *Beyond the Maker's Mark: Paul de Lamerie Silver in the Cahn Collection* (Cambridge: John Adamson, 2007), 22.

<sup>23</sup> As discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis.

<sup>24</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 22203, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Printed Company Resolutions about the Assize, Weight and Marking of Pewter', 1747. A pennyweight (dwt) was a unit of measurement in use in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, worth 1/20 of a Troy ounce and 1/240 of a Troy pound.

<sup>25</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/24, 'Appendix to An Act for Appointing Wardens and Assay-Masters for Assaying Wrought Plate in the Towns of Sheffield and Birmingham', 1773, f. 298.



**Figure 5.1: Waiver, Pewter, Thomas Bancks, 1685, Victoria and Albert Museum, M.984-1926.**

Regulated sponsors' marks were often debated and adapted in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the guilds changed the size or requirements of the mark.<sup>26</sup> Within the pewter trade, the Worshipful Company of Pewterers debated the types of marks that could be struck on pewter, and from 1693 to 1694 issued a number of orders 'not to strike their names at length, but to be at liberty to alter their touches & put their names at length within the same'.<sup>27</sup> The size of the mark was often the focus of the debate. The Worshipful Company of Pewterers complained that producers had 'varied their touches very different, and of a smaller size than what they originally struck at the hall, so that it is difficult to discover or distinguish by the touch, one

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<sup>26</sup> For example, as shown in chapter 1, the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths changed sponsors' marks from the first two letters of a producer's surname, to the first letters of a producer's Christian and surname in 1738. Marcia Pointon, "Jewellery in Eighteenth-Century England," in *Consumers and Luxury*, ed. Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 123.

<sup>27</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Index to the Orders of Court 1691-1740', 18 April 1694, f. 55.

maker's name from another'.<sup>28</sup> The court decided that most pewter should 'be touch'd with a large touch, with the Christian name and sir name, wither of the maker or vendor at full length, in plain roman letters', but that small objects could be 'touched with the small touch, either of the maker or vendor'.<sup>29</sup> Permission was given to producers to change their marks in individual cases that were brought before the guild's court. For instance, permission was given in 1710 to Thomas Paisley to alter the touch that he had initially registered, to 'strike a large touch notwithstanding he has struck a small touch on the hall plate of two letters ownly'.<sup>30</sup> Like Thomas Bancks's mark (Figure 5.1), many pewterers' marks were a combination of a symbol and their name. John Walmsley was given permission in 1713 to change his mark to use the 'lyon rampant and crown or the hart and crown' as his mark, but not the word London.<sup>31</sup> The guild therefore ensured that they could identify an individual producer, who was responsible for the manufacture of a product.

The sponsors' marks that appeared on silver and silver plate were also re-evaluated in the eighteenth century. The regulation of individual marks increased to reflect the expanding range of firms and partnerships. Samuel Garbett, the Birmingham refiner, merchant and manufacturer, highlighted that sponsors' marks should include 'his or her surname, or, in case of any partnership, the name or firm of such partnership... and also some mark figure or device to be struck at the end of such

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<sup>28</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 22203, 'Printed Company Resolutions about the Assize, Weight and Marking of Pewter', 1747.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid; and Guildhall Library, MS 22198/1, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Papers Relating to Country Searches, 1660-1839'.

<sup>30</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Index to the Orders of Court 1691-1740', 12 October 1710.

<sup>31</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07090/9, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Orders of Court 1711-1740', 13 August 1713.

surname or other name or firm such mark figure', as long as it did not imitate a regulatory mark.<sup>32</sup> Whilst Matthew Boulton had his own individual mark, he designed and sketched an additional mark in his diary in 1773, which became the mark of the Boulton Fothergill partnership: the letters MB over IF.<sup>33</sup> Therefore there was a degree of flexibility and self-construction within the regulated systems of marking, in which manufacturers could develop their own mark, and thus their own reputation.

Sponsors' marks were not only enforced by the guilds, but were desired by producers, and so they also appeared on different types of metalware that were not regulated. For example, a steel tobacco box, made in England in 1662, was marked with the sponsor's mark IW in a shield;<sup>34</sup> the mark 'George Grove', was stamped in the base of a brass and iron candlestick that was made in Birmingham in the middle of the eighteenth century (Figure 5.2); and the name of the producer John Fathers was incorporated into the design of the handle of a bronze skillet made by Fathers at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Figure 5.3). Therefore, sponsors' marks could be used in similar ways to the regulatory marks, on the base of a candlestick (Figure 5.2), or in more conspicuous and creative ways (Figure 5.3).

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<sup>32</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/105/90, 'A Bill for Amending an Act of the Thirteenth Year of the Rein of His Present Majesty'.

<sup>33</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/107/8, 'Diary', 1773, f. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, M.26-1964, Tobacco Box, Steel, England, 1662.



**Figure 5.2: Candlestick, Brass and Iron, George Grove, Birmingham, c. 1748-68, Winterthur Museum, 1961.0830.001.**

The use of individual and collective marks inside and outside the regulation of the metalware trade, suggests that they had the potential to benefit individual producers and the trade as a whole. Of course, the presence of marks was not directly connected to quality, and did not automatically result in a good reputation. Producers had to establish their reputation by producing quality metalware, developing their relationship with consumers, and using marketing and advertising to influence their public image.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, when this did occur, individual and collective marks have been seen by historians as a form of branding, in which producers distinguished their products from their competition, and associated their workmanship with

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<sup>35</sup> The use of marketing and advertising to develop a producer's reputation for quality production will be explored in chapter 6 of this thesis.

quality.<sup>36</sup> Recent research has helped broaden the historical understanding of brands.<sup>37</sup> Certain types of goods and materials were more likely to display sponsors' marks and develop brand reputation, for example, ceramics and medicines.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, they were often small-scale consumer goods that were part of a trans-regional market, as argued by Jonathan Hay, which allowed reputation to be carried beyond local communities.<sup>39</sup>



**Figure 5.3: Skillet, Bronze, John Fathers, Somerset, England, c. 1700, Victoria and Albert Museum, M.100-1920.**

Traditionally, economic research has focused on the origin of present-day branding, rather than on considering how the marks on objects were understood in

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<sup>36</sup> Van Damme, “From a ‘Knowledgeable’ Salesman towards a ‘Recognizable’ Product?” 78, 87; and De Munck, “The Agency of Branding,” 1055.

<sup>37</sup> David Wengrow, “Introduction,” in *Cultures of Commodity Branding*, ed. Andrew Bevan and David Wengrow (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2010), 11-33; and Moore and Reid, “The Birth of Brand,” 419.

<sup>38</sup> Styles, “Product Innovation,” 132; and Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces*, 59.

<sup>39</sup> Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces*, 59.

their contemporary context.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, they have often concluded that branding began in the nineteenth century, with the increasing legal protection attached to trademarks.<sup>41</sup> It is only recently that historians have re-evaluated when a mark or a label can be seen as a brand.<sup>42</sup> Art historians and antiques collectors, in contrast, focused on the identifying role that these marks had, which could convey information about producers, retailers and regulators. This stems from the wider historiography of collecting and connoisseurship that began in the early-nineteenth century, which recorded marks so that they could be used for identification.<sup>43</sup> However, the reputation of individual producers has often shifted when surviving objects have become more or less valuable in their circulation between collectors and antiques dealers. Therefore, it is necessary to bring together these disciplinary perspectives to gain a better understanding of the contemporary role of individual and collective reputation.

De Munck emphasises that ‘a distinction must be made between signs that simply convey information on the origin and quality of a product (similar to a barcode) and “modern brands” (i.e. signs that manipulate the projected reputation of the product and create product image and “brand personality”)’.<sup>44</sup> However, this ignores the nuances that occurred when marks were initially applied for identification during the production process and the regulation of the trade, but were later used in different ways by the retailer or consumer. This demonstrates the need to look more closely at how

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<sup>40</sup> Frank I. Schechter, *The Historical Foundations of the Law Relating to Trade-Marks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925), 121.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> De Munck, “The Agency of Branding,” 1055.

<sup>43</sup> William Chaffers, *Hallmarks on Gold and Silver Plate* (London: J. Davy & Sons, 1863); and Frederick Bradbury, *Bradbury’s Book of Hallmarks* (Sheffield: Sheffield Assay Office, [1927] 2014)

<sup>44</sup> De Munck, “The Agency of Branding,” 1055.



their reputation circulated, both through the marks on objects, but also by word-of-mouth, in newspapers, and during parliamentary petitions and debates.

## **5.2 The Importance of Reputation for Regulation**

Reputation played an increasingly important role in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This was linked to changes to the nature of regulation of the metalware trade: the guilds relied increasingly on the public to monitor product quality as they lost their ability to maintain effective searches with the expansion of the trade.<sup>45</sup> It gave the consumer a greater incentive to understand an object and recognise the marks on its surface, or they might unknowingly purchase substandard metalware. Moreover, it gave producers the incentive to maintain their production of good-quality metalware, because their mark acted as a guarantee of quality that made them accountable to the regulator or the consumer if they produced substandard ware. Because it was difficult to visibly assess the quality of metalware, producers and regulatory bodies relied upon the assay process, searches and, most of all, reputation, to maintain product quality. Therefore, both the regulated and producer-driven, individual and collective marks benefited the regulation of quality across the metalware trades.

Regulation had the ability to improve reputation, and build the public's trust in the quality of products across a particular trade.<sup>46</sup> If regulatory systems of quality control could be trusted to monitor and maintain a consistent standard of metalware, then these marks could act as a trusted sign of quality. In particular, the reputation of

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<sup>45</sup> As discussed in chapter 2.

<sup>46</sup> Casson, "Reputation and Responsibility in Medieval English Towns," 387.

regulatory institutions was conveyed through collective marks, such as hallmarks or other quality marks that were enforced by the guilds. As shown by De Munck, the reputation and political standing of the guilds led to trust in the guild system and trust in a product's intrinsic quality because it had been produced by 'an honest master'.<sup>47</sup> Reputation was determined by a wider community of producers, regulators and consumers, and so had to be earned. Therefore, it was necessary for individual producers or producers within particular regions to produce metalware of a good quality, if they wished to develop a good reputation. Once developed, their reputation could be spread by word-of-mouth, or through the object themselves. The marks on objects meant that there did not need to be a personal relationship between a producer and consumer for that reputation and trust in a product's quality to be established.<sup>48</sup>

Reputation could be used within communities of producers to better regulate the quality of production. With the expansion of the trade, there were more partnerships, firms, and an increasing reliance upon subcontracting. Reputation and trust were crucial in these working relationships and business partnerships, particularly when it came to dealing with expensive raw materials such as silver, and Matthew Boulton's large quantities and small profit margins that left no room for mistakes. The importance of trust between producers has been echoed by Francesca Carnevali, who has described the need for 'communities of trust' in the nineteenth-century jewellery trade in Birmingham.<sup>49</sup> As this chapter shows, reputation was crucial

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<sup>47</sup> De Munck, "The Agency of Branding," 1063.

<sup>48</sup> Casson, "An Economic Approach to Regional Business Networks," 30; and Van Damme, "From a 'Knowledgeable' Salesman towards a 'Recognizable' Product?" 78.

<sup>49</sup> Francesca Carnevali, "Golden Opportunities: Jewelry Making in Birmingham between Mass Production and Speciality," *Enterprise and Society* 4/2 (2003): 272-298.

for these same communities even before this period, in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Therefore, reputation could materially improve the regulation of the trade and product quality. Producers and institutions were motivated to develop and maintain a good reputation, and were quick to defend their reputation when faced with any accusations of fraudulent behaviour or poor-quality production. As I will show, by using their reputation, producers could also influence the definition of quality, and the regulatory priorities of the state and guilds. Individuals or groups of producers petitioned the guilds or state directly, and also appealed to the public through newspaper advertisements and letters to influential politicians and members of the social elite. Within the silver trade, both the London and the regional producers claimed that ‘they are so sensible of the many inaccuracies and frauds which are daily committed that they are desirous, the public should settle other rules and regulations as they have devised some to prevent the arti-fices’.<sup>50</sup>

Regulatory institutions, such as the guilds and the state, acknowledged the potential benefit of reputation, and shifted their policy from one of communal co-operation within the ‘mystery’ of the trade, to encouraging greater competition between their members. The by-laws of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, from their first charter in the fifteenth century to the seventeenth century, banned advertising and the ‘boasting of ware and prusing other customers’, with the threat of a 40s fine.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, they restricted the use of marks as means of advertising location and

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<sup>50</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/10, ‘Considerations upon the Petition of the Workers in Silver in the Towns of Birmingham & Sheffield for an Assayer to be Established in those Places’, ff. 1-2.

<sup>51</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07116, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Transcripts of Charter and Bye-Laws’, 1702, ff. 84-85.

quality. It was only from the late-seventeenth century that producers were allowed to develop their individual identity, establish their reputation, and advertise their products to a wider audience.

### **5.3 The Places of Quality Production**

The reputation of individual producers and communities of producers in regional manufacturing towns could circulate nationally and internationally. Regional reputation spread by word-of-mouth, but was also connected to the geographic marks on metalware that identified a product's place of production. Although these marks were not compulsory, many objects across the metalware trades were marked with 'London', 'Birmingham', or 'Sheffield' made. One example can be seen on a pewter plate made by T. Hitchman (Figure 5.4), which displays the stamp 'T.HITCHMAN/MADE IN LONDON' on the surface of the plate, next to the sponsor's mark, mark of quality, and pseudo-hallmark. The crudely inscribed date of 1661 also demonstrates variety of marks that were possible, despite the regulation of the guilds. Like sponsors' marks, geographic marks were often applied to the object for identification purposes.<sup>52</sup> They were increasingly important with the expansion of the metalware trade, as more products were exported, and so needed to be identified nationally and internationally.

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<sup>52</sup> Similar geographic marks were also beyond the metalware trade, for example on furniture and ceramics.



**Figure 5.4: Plate, Pewter, 1666, Sterling Smith Museum and Art Gallery.**

Geographic marks were intertwined with the regulation of the trade. The guilds across the different metalware trades, including the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, Worshipful Company of Cutlers and Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths each attempted to control their use. For example, in 1665, the Worshipful Company of Cutlers in London enforced a bond with the Birmingham Cutlers that they should not apply the mark of the dagger to their knives, which was the mark of the London

Cutlers.<sup>53</sup> Periodically, the guilds attempted to ban the use of geographic marks completely to prevent their misuse. The matter was debated, and in 1677 the Worshipful Company of Pewterers ‘ordered that every person that hath already struck “London” shall deface that said word out of their respective touches and then the said word “London” shall not be put upon or engraven in any touch or any other way struck upon any sort of ware hereafter’.<sup>54</sup> Producers were frequently called to their court, and punished for adding these geographic marks. For example, in 1738 the pewterer Mr Rhodes was fined ‘40s for striking the city arms on 12 dozen plates’.<sup>55</sup> Geographic marks often had the same purpose as other regulatory marks or marks of quality, and so needed to be protected.<sup>56</sup> They allowed regions to develop their own reputation and create a community that could benefit from the collective success and quality of individual producers. Therefore, they sought to protect that reputation.

From the seventeenth century, marks were being used by producers in the metalware trades across the country in increasingly creative, albeit at times illegal or fraudulent ways to capitalise on the reputation of particular places of production or marks of quality. The forging of the marks that described the place of production reflects which places held the reputation for the production of the best-quality

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<sup>53</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 20956, Worshipful Company of Cutlers, ‘Bond from Birmingham Cutlers not to use Company Mark’, 1665. See also, Lionel Bently, “The Making of Modern Trade Mark Law: The Construction of the Legal Concept of Trade Mark (1860-1880),” in *Trade Marks and Brands: An Interdisciplinary Critique*, ed. Lionel Bently, Jennifer Davis and Jane C. Ginsburg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5.

<sup>54</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07119/2, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Charter and Ordinance Book 1699-1873’, 13 December 1677.

<sup>55</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Index to the Orders of Court 1691-1740’, 14 December 1738, f. 5.

<sup>56</sup> De Munck, “The Agency of Branding,” 1058.

metalware. In the seventeenth century, many regional producers deceitfully put ‘London made’ onto their metal goods. In 1715, the pewterers ‘complained of the practice of some country pewterers striking London upon their ware’, and demanded a ‘committee to enquire into and endeavour to prevent the same’.<sup>57</sup> The committee members were understandably concerned about the fraudulent use of London’s name, and the implications that this might have on their reputation if the products were substandard. The London pewterers suspected that these frauds were enacted ‘to give reputation to their bad pewter’.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, they ‘ordered some of the country ware which has London on it to be procured and tried by the standard of the city of London’.

Regional reputation could also be transmitted through hallmarks and the different Assay Office marks that reflected where a piece of silver was assayed. As different regional reputations shifted, producers attempted to assay their goods at the Assay Office with the best reputation.<sup>59</sup> Where this was not possible, some deceitful producers over-stamped the assay mark with a different assay mark to suggest that they were produced and assayed in a different region. For example, some London producers purchased silver directly from Birmingham and Sheffield producers at a low price, and over-stamped the marks to deceive consumers that they were made by

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<sup>57</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Index to the Orders of Court 1691-1740’, 4 August 1715, f. 8.

<sup>58</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07090/9, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Orders of Court 1711-1740’, 4 August 1715.

<sup>59</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/12, ‘Committee on Petitions Relating to Assaying Plate’, ff. 15-16; and Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/12, ‘Copy Report on Sheffield and Birmingham Assay Office Petitions’, f. 17.

themselves in London, and so make a profit.<sup>60</sup> An example of this fraudulent practice can be seen in Figure 5.5, a pair of silver candlesticks made in Sheffield by the firm Makepiece and Carter. The assay mark and date letter are clearly over-stamped with the London marks.



**Figure 5.5: Piano Candlesticks, Sterling Silver, Makepiece and Carter, 1776, Sheffield Assay Office.**

As different regions expanded, and improved the quality, innovation and fashionability of their products, they were also able to improve their reputation. This

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<sup>60</sup> Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 182; and Eric Turner, *English Silver from 1660* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1985), 23.



is clearly demonstrated by the shifting reputation of Birmingham and Sheffield in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which transformed from a reputation for poor-quality production, to high quality and low price innovations.<sup>61</sup> The more popular the mark, and the more successful the regional reputation, the more likely it was to be counterfeited. By the mid-eighteenth century, as Birmingham's reputation improved, London producers, and even producers in France, were found to be fraudulently marking their goods with 'Birmingham'.<sup>62</sup> The improved reputation of Birmingham and Sheffield therefore spread nationally and internationally. The *Northampton Mercury* published an advertisement in 1784, claiming that 'the French Hardware manufacture is so inferior to the English, that great quantities of Birmingham goods, snuff-boxes, surgeons instruments, japan work, or-moulu, &c. &c. are bought by the shopkeepers on the continent, and sold at high prices, as choice productions of Gallic ingenuity'.<sup>63</sup> Boulton perceived a rivalry between his manufactory and the Parisian manufacturers, rather than the London producers, because it was the 'Paris artist who certainly have hitherto rival'd us & all the world in elegance & cheapness', therefore 'they are not easily rival'd unless by the plan we have form'd the essential of wch are cheapness good taste & good execution'.<sup>64</sup>

It was this focus on international reputation that improved the reputation of the trade as a whole, which became known for its quality of production and the innovative

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<sup>61</sup> As shown in chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis, the reasons behind their expansion and improved reputation included their innovation and development of new products and materials. Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 166.

<sup>62</sup> J.R. Harris, *Industrial Espionage and Technological Transfer: Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 202; and Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 157.

<sup>63</sup> *Northampton Mercury*, 5 January 1784.

<sup>64</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to Mess<sup>rs</sup> Wooley Heming', 19 January 1771.

machinery that was developed in the eighteenth century.<sup>65</sup> By 1786 and the re-establishment of trade with France through the Eden Treaty, producers in Birmingham, Sheffield and London, testified that they had nothing to fear from the increase in competition.<sup>66</sup> Thomas Settle, Joseph Parkin, Jonathan Watkinson, manufacturers from Sheffield, and William Hoyle, the Clerk of the Company of Cutlers, argued that their products were superior to those made in France, because of ‘the cheapness of our fuel, upon our skill, upon our tools, upon the excellence of our steel, and upon the convenience of our streams for the purpose of mills, and upon our manufactures being long established and in high vogue - we are told too that there are no such grinding stones in the world as those we have’.<sup>67</sup>

The geographic marks on objects therefore worked to benefit from the reputation of different regions. In some cases, their reputation superseded the mark itself, and particular products became associated with a place of origin known for quality production, such as ‘London porter’ and ‘Durham mustard’.<sup>68</sup> Gary Richardson has argued that these acted as brand names, in which producers were able to develop their reputation for quality production.<sup>69</sup> However, with the expansion of the trade, the marks helped reputations develop across a wider area. By identifying the origin of products, and associating that producer or area with good-quality production, it

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<sup>65</sup> Giorgio Riello and Patrick K. O’Brien, “The Future is Another Country: Offshore Views of the British Industrial Revolution,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 22/1 (2009), 4.

<sup>66</sup> The Eden Treaty is also discussed in chapter 3.

<sup>67</sup> British Library, Add MS 34462, Auckland Papers, Vol. LI., ‘Evidence for a Commercial Treaty with France’, 1786, ff. 49-50.

<sup>68</sup> Nancy Cox, *The Complete Tradesman: A Study of Retailing, 1550-1820* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 103.

<sup>69</sup> Richardson, “Brand Names before the Industrial Revolution,” 5.

reassured the consumer, and reduced the uncertainty and risk when purchasing metalware.<sup>70</sup>

#### **5.4 The Petition for New Assay Offices**

By developing their regional reputation, producers aimed to associate themselves with the production of quality metalware. They could use this reputation to dominate the trade by attracting large numbers of consumers, and make themselves more influential in the regulation of the trade by manipulating public opinion and petitioning Parliament or the guilds. One clear instance of this was when regional producers successfully petitioned Parliament for new regional Assay Offices in Birmingham and Sheffield in 1773, which was unsuccessfully challenged by the London goldsmiths. The Birmingham and Sheffield producers attempted to use their improving reputation to gain more regulatory control, whilst the London producers struggled to protect their dominance of the trade and reputation of quality production. Reputation was a major factor in the petitions on both sides of the debate.

It is important to acknowledge that each of the petitions was aiming to be persuasive, and so likely reflect how the interested parties wanted to be perceived rather than how they acted in practice. The stakes were high for the London, Birmingham and Sheffield producers: the London producers wanted to restrict the emerging regional competition, which threatened their profits and livelihoods, whilst the Birmingham and Sheffield producers were limited in their expansion until they were granted their own Assay Offices. Their rhetoric and choice of language must therefore be read with caution, as it inevitably exaggerated the truth and importance

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<sup>70</sup> Moore and Reid, "The Birth of Brand," 430.

of their respective claims. Matthew Boulton, in particular, was known for his sales ability and showmanship.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, the language that the petitions used, and the debates that emerged about product quality, trust, and respectability, gives an insight into the deliberation of quality.

There were a number of practical reasons why producers in Birmingham and Sheffield petitioned for the opening of new Assay Offices. As discussed in more detail in the first chapter of this thesis, Assay Offices were crucial within the silver trade because all silver objects had to be tested and marked with a hallmark to ensure that they were of the legal standard. Although manufacturers in Birmingham and Sheffield were required to assay their silver goods in either London or Chester before 1773, the long journey (seventy miles from Birmingham to Chester and more than a hundred to London) was costly.<sup>72</sup> For example, the added expense of the carriage fare and insurance was ‘upwards of £3’ for a return journey from Sheffield to London.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, the journey often led to ‘delay & uncertainty’ and ‘very frequently goods are damaged in carrying backwards and forwards’.<sup>74</sup> There was also the added risk of intellectual theft, and the interception of new products and patterns on the journey. Ultimately, the Birmingham and Sheffield manufacturers wanted to embrace the culture of regulation, and the marking of metalware. They wanted to ensure that their products were of a high quality and adhered to the necessary regulations, but at a more

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<sup>71</sup> Rita McLean, “Introduction”, in *Matthew Boulton: Selling what all the World Desires*, ed. Shena Mason (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 1-7.

<sup>72</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/23, ‘Memorial Relative to Assaying and Marking Wrought Plate at Birmingham, & c.’, f. 2.

<sup>73</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/12, ‘Committee on Petitions Relating to Assaying Plate’, 1773, f. 22.

<sup>74</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/13, ‘Committee on the Sheffield Assay Petitions’, 19 February 1773, ff. 3-4.

competitive price and without inconvenience. The lack of an Assay Office was limiting the expansion of the trade in those regions, and Boulton warned that: 'I am very desirous of becoming a great silver-smith yet I am not determined never to take up that branch in the large way intended unless powers can be obtained to have a marking hall at Birmigm'.<sup>75</sup>

The manufacturers in Birmingham were confident that their 'Birmingham ware' was equal to, or even superior in quality to, the London metalware and could successfully compete. Philippe Minard has suggested that the increasing product diversification seen in the metalware trades from the late-seventeenth century placed the economy of quality in doubt, and signalled a shift of importance from quality to price.<sup>76</sup> However, the language used in this campaign shows that whilst price and value were elements of the debate around the emerging competition of the Birmingham trade, quality remained a significant focus of regulators and producers alike. The Birmingham and Sheffield petitioners suggested that the self-regulation of the guilds was ineffective, because it relied upon 'a judge chosen and paid by the very people upon whose works he is to pass sentence'.<sup>77</sup> They further criticised the monopolisation of the guild system, and its London-centric focus, by arguing that 'at no time does it appear to have been the intention of the legislature to oblige workmen in gold and silver to live in any particular spots, or to lay restraints on their industry, much less to

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<sup>75</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to the Earl of Shelbourne', 7 January 1771.

<sup>76</sup> Philippe Minard, "Facing Uncertainty: Markets, Norms and Conventions in the Eighteenth Century," in *Regulating the British Economy, 1660-1850*, ed. Perry Gauci (London: Ashgate, 2011), 189.

<sup>77</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/13, 'Reply of the Petitioners from Birmingham and Sheffield to the Cast of the Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Plateworkers of the City of London and Places Adjacent', f. 2.

grant a few towns a monopoly of the trade in these Metals'.<sup>78</sup> In fact, Boulton suggested that greater competition actively improved product quality and the national trade, because 'it can deprive the other Towns of no part of their trade, except by working better than they do and cheaper; and against losses of business by these means the proper securities are not privileges, but excellence in design and workmanship, and moderate prices'.<sup>79</sup>

The London goldsmiths strongly opposed the opening of new Assay Offices. The language used in their debates and petitions, as well as the wider context within which these debates occurred, suggests that they were not only influenced by their responsibility to regulate the trade, but were motivated by their fear of regional competition. One of the main arguments proposed by the London goldsmiths was that the national metalware trade was not large enough for there to be an increasing number of producers across the country, and that poor producers in London would suffer.<sup>80</sup> In contrast, the Sheffield petitioners argued that they did not only think that the regional producers would profit from the opening of an Assay Office, but that 'the London Friend would get some profit'.<sup>81</sup> They suggested that it was because of their successful international trade, 'the reasonable prices for which they deal, and the Quality of their

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<sup>78</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/23, 'Memorial Relative to Assaying and Marking Wrought Plate at Birmingham, &c.', ff. 2-3.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/4, 'Case of the Goldsmiths, Silversmiths, and Plate Workers of the City of London, and Places Adjacent', ff. 2-3.

<sup>81</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/12, 'Committee on Petitions Relating to Assaying Plate', 18 February 1773, ff. 14-15.

productions, they would be enabled to render their Commerce still more extensive, and consequently still more beneficial both to the Nation and to themselves'.<sup>82</sup>

The London goldsmiths attempted to maintain their monopoly of the metalware trade and their reputation for quality production. They wanted to be viewed as reliable producers, and discredit the Birmingham and Sheffield producers as untrustworthy, inexperienced and deceitful. According to the London goldsmiths, 'the power... of assaying Gold and Silver is sacred'.<sup>83</sup> They complained that in Sheffield and Birmingham, 'there are few persons at all conversant with, or skilled in the Gold and Silver Plate Manufactory', and so by allowing an Assay Office would 'ruin the whole goldsmiths trade in this kingdom, by sinking it into an irretrievable state of discredit and suspicion'.<sup>84</sup> The London goldsmiths regularly accused the regional producers of lacking specialised expertise, and suggested that they were 'very ignorant' and 'very dishonest'.<sup>85</sup> Their petitions emphasised the historic dominance of the trade in London, and the way in which the London producers were 'very knowing in the art of mystery, very honest and very accurate'.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, their argument was as much based upon their honesty and trustworthiness, as their physical ability to produce quality metalware. Debates about product quality and value rarely occurred

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<sup>82</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/23, 'Memorial Relative to Assaying and Marking Wrought Plate at Birmingham, & c.', f. 2.

<sup>83</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/4, 'Case of the Goldsmiths, Silversmiths, and Plate Workers of the City of London, and Places Adjacent', f. 2.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Parliamentary Papers Online, *Report from the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Manner of Conducting the Several Assay Offices in London, York, Exeter, Bristol, Chester, Norwich and Newcastle upon Tyne*, 1773, 10.

<sup>86</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/10, 'Considerations upon the Petition of the Workers in Silver in the Towns of Birmingham & Sheffield for an Assayer to be Established in those Places', ff. 1-2.

without a reference to the trust and ‘established credit’ of the individual and the collective guild. It was argued by the London goldsmiths that this contributed to the ‘elegance utility and true intrinsic value’ of the metalware.<sup>87</sup>

In particular, the London goldsmiths attempted to portray the regional manufacturers as untrustworthy because of the history of counterfeiting coinage in those regions. The London goldsmiths and committee who interviewed the petitioners in Birmingham and Sheffield, questioned the regional producers about the risk of counterfeiting. Birmingham, in particular, had suffered prior to this period because of its reputation for poor-quality ‘brummagem ware’, which had developed because of the low standards of production, the reputation for fraudulent behaviour and the production of counterfeit coinage in the city.<sup>88</sup> Even in the eighteenth century, newspapers warned to ‘beware of Birmingham Counterfeits’, as an advertisement placed by J. Kirk stated in 1761.<sup>89</sup> This reputation was embedded in the cultural consciousness, as seen by a satirical ‘it-narrative’ called *The Birmingham Counterfeit; or Invisible Spectator*, that was published in 1772.<sup>90</sup> The story brought to life an

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<sup>87</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/11, ‘Copy of Petition of Goldsmiths of London against Sheffield & Birmingham Assay Office Petitions’, f. 2.

<sup>88</sup> Eric Delieb, *The Great Silver Manufactory: Matthew Boulton and the Birmingham Silversmiths 1760-1790* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), 40; and Francesca Carnevali, “Malefactors and Honourable Men: The Making of Commercial Honesty in Nineteenth-Century Industrial Birmingham,” in *Industrial Clusters and Regional Business Networks in England, 1750-1970*, ed. John F. Wilson and Andrew Popp (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 195.

<sup>89</sup> *Public Ledger or the Daily Register of Commerce and Intelligence*, Issue 386 (6 April 1761).

<sup>90</sup> *The Birmingham Counterfeit; or, Invisible Spectator. A Sentimental Romance* (London, 1772). For more about the genre of the ‘it-narrative’, see Mark Blackwell, ed. *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2010).



inanimate object, the counterfeit coin, and ‘endowed it with the faculties of hearing, seeing and admonishing’.<sup>91</sup> The reputation of Birmingham and Sheffield products was therefore tainted by their historic reputation and the lack of trustworthiness of producers in those regions.

Metalware and money were connected by the tools and machinery with which they were both made. As the historian George Selgin shows, the shift in the production of coinage in the late-seventeenth century, when coins began to be die stamped rather than hammered or hand struck, coincided with the emergence of identical technology in the metalware trades.<sup>92</sup> Both production methods involved the same tools and processes as the production of buttons and other small toys, from the rolling of metal, to punching with screw presses.<sup>93</sup> Calverley Pinkney, who testified during the trial of John Bell who was accused of coining offences in 1753, described the overlapping tools in the metalware and coining trades. He recorded that, ‘I have seen all the various presses that are used in the mint; and have also seen several in tradesmen's shops they are the same sort with those in the mint’.<sup>94</sup> Criminally-minded producers in the metalware trade could therefore put the machinery to other uses, and create counterfeit coinage. In their defence, the Birmingham and Sheffield producers admitted ‘that its true these tools may be used for coining’, but that the opening of new Assay Offices ‘will not in the smallest degree give them any assistance in making or debasing

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<sup>91</sup> *The Birmingham Counterfeit*, Preface.

<sup>92</sup> George Selgin, *Good Money: Birmingham Button Makers, The Royal Mint, and the Beginnings of Modern Coinage* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 12.

<sup>93</sup> Selgin, *Good Money*, 129.

<sup>94</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, 5 December 1753, trial of John Bell (t17531205-65).

money... that it is next to impossible for any considerable quantity of coin to be made at Birmingham without the persons being very liable to detection'.<sup>95</sup>

The Birmingham petitioners used similar language to the London goldsmiths, and attempted to demonstrate their trustworthiness, respectability and honour. They named the regulatory body that they proposed would manage the new Assay Offices the 'Guardians of the Standard of silver plate in Birmingham; and the other the Guardians & c. in Sheffield', which were 'empowered to appoint, in its town, assayers, and other officers necessary for the faithful discharge of a trust so important both to individuals and to this kingdom'.<sup>96</sup> Their name therefore reflected the importance that was placed on trust. The 'Guardians' would be comprised of thirty local men, with a maximum of ten silversmiths, so that the regulators worked to guarantee the quality of metalware for consumers rather than the manufacturer.<sup>97</sup> Therefore, they sought to develop their reputation and build trust in the quality of their producers and their products.

## 5.5 Manipulating Reputation

Reputation could therefore be constructed in the public sphere.<sup>98</sup> Individuals, regulatory institutions, and regional groups of producers could associate themselves

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<sup>95</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/10, 'Considerations upon the Petition of the Workers in Silver in the Towns of Birmingham & Sheffield for an Assayer to be Established in those Places', ff. 3-4.

<sup>96</sup> *Friday's Post*, 3 June 1773.

<sup>97</sup> Jennifer Tann, *Birmingham Assay Office, 1773-1993* (Birmingham: Francis Lomas Ltd, 1993), 19.

<sup>98</sup> As I will show in the next chapter, this was also connected to the wider development of marketing and advertising that emerged in the late-seventeenth century.

with the production of quality metalware. To a certain extent, this was within their control, if they developed their reputation by word-of-mouth, in newspaper advertisements or through the marks on objects. These different agents could manipulate how they were perceived by regulators, consumers and the wider public, and they could also damage the reputation of their rivals. Trust in a product in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, depended on trust in a producer, and so it was necessary to preserve the good reputation of both.<sup>99</sup>

As the conflicts between competing powers in London, Birmingham and Sheffield grew more heated, they became entangled with attempts to manipulate the reputation of the producers and their products. The positive reputation of influential members of the social elite was used to support the campaign for new Assay Offices. Boulton and Garbett encouraged the campaign to seek the advice of ‘respectable characters who will like to have it seen that they patronise Sheffield’.<sup>100</sup> Garbett wrote that ‘I am convinced that it will produce very important effects - the gun trade & nail trade stand in great need of the patronage of men of rank in our neighbourhood’.<sup>101</sup> In particular, Boulton and Garbett petitioned for the support of Lord North, the Prime Minister from 1770 to 1782. They proposed that the relationship would be mutually beneficial because ‘nothing can be more desirable than establishing your reputation in

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<sup>99</sup> William J. Ashworth, “‘Between the Trader and the Public’: British Alcohol Standards and the Proof of Good Governance,” *Technology and Culture* 42/1 (2001), 35.

<sup>100</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/37, ‘Letter Samuel Garbett to Matthew Boulton’, 3 May 1773, ff. 1-2.

<sup>101</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/38, ‘Letter Samuel Garbett to Matthew Boulton’, 6 May 1773.

silver ways upon the most permanent basis'.<sup>102</sup> This demonstrates that reputation was used in practical and tactical ways, as a tool to protect or advance the metalware trade.

There were also attempts to damage reputation in order to influence the regulation of the trade. According to Mr Thomas Cliff, who previously worked in Birmingham but had become a journeyman in London, he was asked to 'go to the Goldsmiths Hall and tell the Gentlemen there that... [he] had been paid with bad Money at Mr Boltons factory', and he would be rewarded with five guineas.<sup>103</sup> According to the witnesses, they had aimed 'to fill his councils mouth to be a blot on Mr Boultons character to hinder them from getting the Assay Office at Birmingham'. The accusation had the potential to damage Boulton's reputation, so in his defence, he planned to publish a newspaper article in 1773, that would read:

Notwithstanding the most infamous reflections propagated in the news papers & by hand bills, insinuating that people who lived in reputation in this town have been suspected of clipping & coining. We have the pleasure to assure our readers that some noblemen & gentlemen of the most eminent rank in Staffordshire & Warwickshire are so perfectly convinced that such practices were never known in this neighbourhood except amongst people of no character or significance either as artists or otherwise.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Birmingham City Archives MS 3782/12/89/18, 'Draft Letter Matthew Boulton to Lord North', 1773.

<sup>103</sup> Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, G.II.II.5., 'Committee on the Assay Office', 1773, f. 5.

<sup>104</sup> Birmingham City Archives MS 3782/12/88/40, 'Letter Samuel Garbett to Matthew Boulton', 8 May 1773, f. 3.

Again, the reputation of ‘noblemen & gentlemen’ was used to reassure the public, which improved the reputation of, and trust in, the regional producers. This gives an insight into how reputation circulated, with reference to a variety of printed media that communicated reputation, including newspapers and handbills. There were therefore attempts on both side of the debate to manipulate reputation through persuasive means or plotting sabotage. Different groups of producers used reputation to influence the priorities and the decisions of the regulatory bodies.

Newspaper advertisements were often used to defend the reputation of producers when it had been challenged or falsely manipulated. Producers were keen to defend their reputation across different trades; however, it was even more important in the metalware trade because it was especially difficult to visually judge the quality of metal goods and therefore it was crucial to trust in a producer and the quality of their products.<sup>105</sup> In *Aris’s Birmingham Gazette*, published on Monday 30 November 1761, an advertisement declared that:

WHEREAS I ALBERT KIECHEL, DID ON Thursday last, take out of the warehouse of Abraham Ireland, Button-maker, a card of sleeve-buttons his property, without his privity or consent, and have endeavoured to injure him in his character; not I do hereby acknowledge the above to be fact, and do humbly ask the said Abraham Ireland’s pardon for the same, and do consent that the above be put into

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<sup>105</sup> As shown in chapter 1 of this thesis, the quality of metalware was difficult to judge because it could not be produced in its pure state, and so had to be a mixture of different materials.

the publick papers of this town.<sup>106</sup>

Albert Kiechel had been forced to publish this confession as a form of public punishment, and to prevent any lasting damage to the character of Abraham Ireland. Advertisements also defended the trade more broadly. In 1760, a letter published in the *London Chronicle* challenged the facts of a letter that had been published earlier that month, that was ‘purposely calculated to mislead those who are unacquainted with the subject’.<sup>107</sup> It defended the buckle and chape trade, saying that they are ‘as useful and strong as iron... for its well known that brass chapes unless they are made very clumsy are entirely useless, and that buckles with iron chapes will always be sold preferable to any other every where’.<sup>108</sup> Newspaper advertisements could therefore be used as a public conversation, that could manipulate or correct individual and collective reputation.

Reputation could also be manipulated through the fraudulent marking of metal goods. As shown earlier in this chapter, producers fraudulently marked their goods with geographic marks, and over-stamped regional assay marks. Sponsors’ marks on silver were also fraudulently over-stamped, as seen on the hallmark on a pair of silver candlesticks, assayed in Sheffield in 1774, that displayed the over-stamped sponsor’s mark of Robert Jones (Figure 5.6). This meant that producers could benefit from the physical quality of products that had been purchased wholesale, if they added their own mark to them. Emma Packer discovered that two of the same product had been marked with two different marks, and concluded that ‘either Folkingham was

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<sup>106</sup> *Aris’s Birmingham Gazette*, 30 November 1761.

<sup>107</sup> *London Chronicle*, Issue 505 (20 March 1760).

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

stamping Willaume's work with his own sponsor's mark or both of them were obtaining work from the same outworker and marking it as their own'.<sup>109</sup> This also meant that producers could benefit from the reputation of their own mark, and manipulate their reputation for quality production.



**Figure 5.6: Pair of Candlesticks, Sterling Silver, Robert Jones, 1774, Sheffield Assay Office.**

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<sup>109</sup> Emma Packer, "The Interaction between English and Huguenot Goldsmiths in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," in *Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Bankers: Innovation and the Transfer of Skill 1550 to 1750*, ed. David Mitchell (Oxford: Alden Press, 1995), 80.

## 5.6 The Impact of Reputation

As this chapter has shown, the reputation of people, products and processes within the metalware trades could be manipulated by regulators and producers. The reputation of particular producers or regions often had a lasting and extensive impact, and the impact of negative reputation was especially detrimental to individual producers and regions. This builds upon literature around reputation, and gives an insight into the deliberation of quality, and communication between regulator, producer and consumer. As the trade expanded in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, reputation was used as an informal way to regulate quality, when the guilds increasingly encouraged consumers and the wider public to be aware of fraud.<sup>110</sup> The court records of the guilds reveal a general leniency towards individuals who produced poor-quality metalware, with a preference for rehabilitation and repentance rather than punishment. Nevertheless, this verdict had a greater impact outside the court of the guilds, when a record of producers with ‘defective ware’ or bad workmanship was made into a ‘black list of London workmen... who have had plate broke’.<sup>111</sup> A damaged reputation had an impact on the individual, as well as the regional trade. The silversmith William Abdy, had to leave Sheffield because ‘during the time of my apprenticeship my master [John Osborne] committed a fraud upon the publick which fraud was, he plated the knives hasts and sold them for silver - the consequence of

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<sup>110</sup> As argued in chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>111</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/40, ‘Letter Samuel Garbett to Matthew Boulton’, 8 May 1773, f. 2.



which was a general stagnation of trade in that business'.<sup>112</sup> Reputation may have been even more crucial outside London, where the guilds' control was less effective. It was this 'informal' way of regulating the trade that was used to maintain a high standard of production and product quality.

The reputation of individual producers and their marks spread outside regional networks of producers and consumers. Matthew Boulton wrote in his diary of a 'Mr Creswick a good filemaker in Sheffield his mark is R & Sceptor over at Attercliff near Sheffield Rennell Cole is got of weh they turn toys'.<sup>113</sup> This again highlights the way in which marks were not just used for identification purposes, but could be used as a form of branding to convey messages about quality and trust, once producers and their marks had developed their reputation. It also demonstrates a wider knowledge of producers and their marks than has been explored in the historiography.

Producers and retailers did not underestimate the impact of word-of-mouth and the objects themselves. Good-quality metalware, workmanship, and reasonable prices had the potential to speak for itself. Consumers discussed products amongst themselves, and metalware was often on display for any visitors to see. Producers and retailers gained a lot of trade through recommendations. For example, Falconer wrote to Boulton that 'I saw sometime ago four candlesticks of the Doric or Tonick pillar kind of silver plated metal the price of which I heard was 6 guineas. If you have any of that hand ready made about that price I should be glad if you wou'd send them to

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<sup>112</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/14, 'Minutes of the Sheffield Assay Petition', 24 February 1773, ff. 2-3. See also, Gordon Crosskey, *Old Sheffield Plate: A History of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Plated Trade* (Oxford: Treffry Publishing, 2011), 5.

<sup>113</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/107/4, 'Diary', 1769, f. 2.

me at Mansfield’.<sup>114</sup> This demonstrates the way in which producers and retailers developed and constructed their reputation through their products. The material or ‘conspicuous’ characteristics of an object could also act as a form of branding, as shown by Gary Richardson.<sup>115</sup>

Reputation also had an international impact. The Worshipful Company of Pewterers warned that ‘the company have received information that the great abuses committed in many places in the country, both in the base mixture of metals, and ye imperfect workmanship thereof, which is a detrimente to the kingdom in general, and to the trade of the company in p[ar]ticular as it lessens the reputation acquired abroad of making the best pewter in the world’.<sup>116</sup> The expansion of the trade, and the increasing success of the export trade, placed a greater importance on reputation as personal contact was more difficult. Despite the distance, reputation could be communicated by travelling merchants, through letters and in newspapers. Marks were increasingly important, and their symbolic nature allowed their meanings to overcome any language barriers.

Producers also understood the importance of developing a good reputation with the consumer.<sup>117</sup> William Badcock’s *New Touchstone for Gold and Silver* advised the consumer to look for the hallmark on silver as a trusted mark and guarantee of quality. When this was not possible, or the company mark was not clear, it advised the

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<sup>114</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/18, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1769, ‘Letter from William Falconer’, 12 August 1769.

<sup>115</sup> Richardson, “Brand Names before the Industrial Revolution,” 5.

<sup>116</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 22198/1, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘Papers Relating to Country Searches, 1660-1839’.

<sup>117</sup> As I will show in chapter 6 of this thesis, sponsors’ marks were used in the advertising and marketing of metalware, and were occasionally displayed on trade cards that circulated amongst consumers.

consumer ‘to take care that he know the workman to be able and honest, and his mark upon every part of the work that is wrought asunder... then there will be the less fear of being cheated’.<sup>118</sup> The reputation of individual producers and regulatory marks was crucial throughout an object’s life-cycle. The mark was therefore part of a wider communication network that created, and manipulated reputation. William Ashworth suggests that brands emerged as an alternative to regulated marks of quality, because ‘the regulation of quality switched from the state to the market’.<sup>119</sup> However, as this chapter has shown, this was not a clear and binary shift. Within the metalware trade, consumers were encouraged to develop their knowledge of the state enforced regulatory marks. Moreover, producers could develop their reputation based on the individual and collective marks that were regulated or that emerged beyond the regulation of the trade.

The benefit of reputation, and the consumer knowledge of regulatory marks or sponsors’ marks was twofold. From the producer’s perspective, it meant that they could charge a premium price for a product ‘for access to the meanings, social relations, and affect that consumers themselves have produced’.<sup>120</sup> This price reflected the trust that could be placed in a product’s authorship and quality, as well as its sign-

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<sup>118</sup> William Badcock, *A New Touch-stone for Gold and Silver Wares* (London: Printed and Sold by W. Freeman, 1708), 93. For an introduction to, and further discussion of Badcock’s text, see chapters 2 and 8.

<sup>119</sup> Ashworth, “Quality and the Roots of Manufacturing ‘Expertise’,” 245.

<sup>120</sup> Robert J. Foster, “The Work of the New Economy: Consumers, Brands, and Value Creation,” *Cultural Anthropology* 22/4 (2007), 718; and Bert De Munck, “Skills, Trust, and Changing Consumer Preferences: The Decline of Antwerp’s Craft Guilds from the Perspective of the Product Market, c.1500-1800,” *International Review of Social History* 53/2 (2008), 198.

value and fashionability.<sup>121</sup> David Higgins and Geoffrey Tweedale suggest that the trade marks on Sheffield cutlery may have been a liability rather than a benefit to producers, because they were held accountable for any substandard metalware.<sup>122</sup> However, as this chapter has shown, the benefits could be substantial, and the reputation of producers or groups of producers meant that their goods could be differentiated in an increasingly crowded market.<sup>123</sup> Secondly, from the consumer's perspective, it acted as a guarantee of quality, and a way to protect against information asymmetry.<sup>124</sup> As this chapter has shown, the individual and collective marks on objects could communicate information to other producers, regulators and consumers, about the origins of a product, and its quality.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Van Damme, "From a 'Knowledgeable' Salesman towards a 'Recognizable' Product?" 97.

<sup>122</sup> Higgins and Tweedale, "Asset or Liability?" 1-27.

<sup>123</sup> Teresa Da Silva Lopes and Paul Duguid, "Introduction: Brands and Competitiveness," in *Trademarks, Brands, and Competitiveness*, ed. Teresa Da Silva Lopes and Paul Duguid (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 1; Mara Wilkins, "The Neglected Intangible Asset: The Influence of the Trade Mark on the Rise of the Modern Corporation," *Business History* 34/1 (1992), 70; and Ruth Herman, "An Exercise in Early Modern Branding" *Journal of Marketing Management* 19/7 (2003), 710.

<sup>124</sup> The role of the sponsors' mark as a guarantee of quality will be discussed further in chapter 7.

<sup>125</sup> Mara Wilkins, "The Neglected Intangible Asset: The Influence of the Trade Mark on the Rise of the Modern Corporation," *Business History* 34/1 (1992), 70; Wengrow, "Introduction," 22; and Van Damme, "From a 'Knowledgeable' Salesman towards a 'Recognizable' Product?" 75.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that the regulation of people, products and processes, and the perception of quality in the metalware trade, was inextricably linked to reputation. Not only did producers want to improve the trade materially, they also wanted to maintain or gain regulatory control, and the reputation of trust, respectability and good-quality metalware. A good reputation was crucial for the working relationships within the trade. More importantly, a good reputation was necessary for the relationships between producers, regulators and consumers. Not only did guild and state regulations attempt to control the reputation of the trade, but different groups of producers manipulated popular opinion to influence the priorities of the regulatory bodies, which is demonstrated most clearly in the petitions for and against new Assay Offices in Birmingham and Sheffield in 1773. Therefore, reputation was strategically manipulated by conveying information through different means, either as marks on an object, or in dialogue with other producers and the wider public by word-of-mouth or in print. By building on the literature on reputation, this chapter gives an insight into the deliberation of quality. The definition of quality metalware was not simply about the material and physical quality of products, but was influenced by the reputation of particular people, products and processes.

## **Chapter 6.**

### **The Advertising and Marketing of Quality Metalware**

Reputation was managed and manipulated by producers and retailers through sophisticated advertising and marketing strategies designed to popularise and sell their goods. They used different methods to distinguish themselves from their competitors; some invested in advertising through trade cards and newspaper advertisements, whilst others chose to preserve the curiosity of their goods and avoid advertising altogether. Those producers and retailers who did advertise their goods chose to focus upon different aspects of their business, such as price, product variety, innovation or fashion. This choice was the business decision of the individual or partnership; however, it also reflected popular ideas about what made metalware desirable, and what producers and retailers thought motivated consumers. Marketing strategies were also influenced by the type of object: whether it was decorative or functional, a luxury or an everyday product.

Advertising was not just designed to attract new consumers, but aimed to encourage repeat custom, gain the support of influential fashionable figures, and develop the reputation and popularity of particular producers, retailers and their products. New print mediums, including newspapers, trade cards and bill-heads, were increasingly used across the metalware trades in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to communicate with the consumer and the public. It is this collection of visual sources and printed ephemera that have engaged the interest of historians in

recent years.<sup>1</sup> However, print could be expensive, exclusive and relatively rare, and so was only one aspect of wider marketing methods that included the design of retail spaces; and the development of personal relationships with consumers, the nobility and the social elite.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter sheds light on the metalware trade, how consumer goods were marketed, and how quality was conveyed. A close analysis of a range of visual sources, including trade cards, provide insights into the contemporary view of consumer goods through the representations of producers and their products.<sup>3</sup> As this chapter shows, messages about quality were both explicit and intertwined with discussions about production, innovation, and fashionability. Quality was implicitly conveyed through the decorative frames, heraldic imagery and depiction of objects on trade cards and bill-heads, as well as the reputation of trust and respectability that circulated by word-of-mouth.

This chapter explores the different methods of marketing and the ways in which they influenced how quality was perceived and defined. It begins by analysing

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<sup>1</sup> Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, "Selling Consumption in the Eighteenth Century: Advertising and the Trade Card in Britain and France," *Cultural and Social History* 4/2 (2007): 145-170; Philippa Hubbard, "Trade Cards in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Consumer Culture: Movement, Circulation, and Exchange in Commercial and Collecting Spaces," *Material Culture Review* 74 (2012), 30-46; and Claire Walsh, "Shopping in Early Modern London c. 1660-1800," Unpublished PhD Thesis, European University Institute, Florence, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Claire Walsh, "The Advertising and Marketing of Consumer Goods in Eighteenth Century London," in *Advertising and the European City: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Clemens Wischermann and Elliott Shore (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 79-95.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Use of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001); and Ludmilla Jordanova, *The Look of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

the role of advertising in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the integration of new products alongside the existing range of objects and second-hand goods. Next, an analysis of the language and imagery used in a sample of trade cards gives an insight into the visual and linguistic conventions that reoccurred in advertisements and the wider marketing strategies of producers and retailers. It undertakes a qualitative study of trade cards from a range of different collections, including the Heal collection at the British Museum, and a quantitative study of a sample of trade cards and bill-heads from the London Metropolitan Archives.<sup>4</sup> The second part of this chapter explores the main conventions and marketing strategies that emerge from the analysis of trade cards: the role of different retail spaces, an emphasis upon product variety, representations of production, descriptions of innovations, and a discussion of fashionability. In particular, it emphasises how producers and retailers cultivated the perception of production and their reputation as producers of quality metalware, by incorporating images and descriptions of production. Details about production were especially important when marketing new products, materials and designs, which helped emphasise that producers were in a unique position to provide consumers with innovative designs, increasing variety, and good-quality metalware. These messages to the consumer, through the marketing and retailing of metalware, contributed to debates about quality, and influenced how production was perceived in everyday practice and in the public imagination.

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<sup>4</sup> Of the 1,516 trade cards and bill-heads in the London Metropolitan Archive collection dated pre-1800, 9% (140) were associated with the metalware trade. I have included a range of trades directly associated with metalware. However, I have excluded a number of more specialist trades such as watch makers, jewellers, gunsmiths, bellfounders and instrument makers (when not listed alongside goldsmiths).



## 6.1 Advertising in the Eighteenth Century

The development of advertising and marketing in the eighteenth century was part of a changing attitude to competition and a wider shift in the regulation of the trade. Prior to the late-seventeenth century, regulations within the guilds encouraged producers to restrict the knowledge of the trade to other guild members, and especially to those outside the guilds. As by-law 18 of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers ordered, producers were required ‘not to Reveal the secrets of the Court of Assistants... or private debates’.<sup>5</sup> It aimed to restrict information about the administrative running of the guilds, as well as protect trade secrets. This sense of secrecy was not just enforced by the guilds, but individual producers understood the importance of protecting their own ideas and innovations. Therefore, within the silver trade, when the regional producers petitioned for new Assay Offices in Birmingham and Sheffield, they refused to write details about their manufacturing plans or business strategies on paper in their letters, ‘for reasons not prudent to put upon paper even to you’.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, one of the main arguments for the new Assay Offices was concern over the risk of the theft of patterns and products when they were sent to be assayed in Chester and London, and so producers wanted their own Assay Office on their doorstep, within their trusted community.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, once the guilds allowed a wider degree of competition from the late-seventeenth century, many producers sought to differentiate themselves

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<sup>5</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 07118, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, ‘By-laws, Approved Office Copy’, 1766, f. 38.

<sup>6</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/37, ‘Letter Samuel Garbett to Matthew Boulton’, 3 May 1773.

<sup>7</sup> See chapter 5 of this thesis.

from each other to appeal to the consumer.<sup>8</sup> They aimed to develop the reputation of particular places, people and products. In doing so, they utilised networks of knowledge, and communicated and restricted information at different times to preserve the ‘mystery’ of the trade or convey messages about quality.

The wider dissemination of print, and the development of periodicals and newspapers, meant that there were new possibilities for marketing and advertising. Weekly newspapers and periodicals were established in London and the largest cities in the seventeenth century, and in a wider range of regional towns in the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Alongside national and international news, there were often pages of advertisements that published messages from producers and retailers about their products. Recent research has provided a better insight into the role of newspaper advertisements in the marketing of consumer goods.<sup>10</sup> Not only were newspapers used to advertise a firm and their products, but they were also useful spaces in which to inform the public about new partnerships, the transfer of production from a deceased producer to their widow or another local tradesman, or to challenge false rumours and damaged reputation.<sup>11</sup> Advertisements could be published by a range of producers and retailers, from larger businesses, to smaller specialist shops, temporary retail premises

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<sup>8</sup> For a theoretical discussion of competition and differentiation see Frank Sitwell, *Political Economy: The Contest of Economic Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 180-184.

<sup>9</sup> Victoria Morgan, “Beyond the Boundary of the Shop: Retail Advertising Spaces in Eighteenth-Century Provincial England,” in *Cultures of Selling: Perspectives on Consumption and Society since 1700*, ed. John Benson and Laura Ugolini (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 64.

<sup>10</sup> Walsh, “The Advertising and Marketing of Consumer Goods,” 79.

<sup>11</sup> The role of newspaper advertisements in the communication between producer and consumer is also explored in chapters 2, 5 and 8.

or auctions. This was reflected in the varying price of advertisements, which ranged from the standard charge of 2s to the *London Gazette*'s rate of 10s per advertisement.<sup>12</sup>

Another source of information was the trade card, which emerged from the mid- seventeenth century as a means of communicating with the consumer and advertising the producer or retailer's location and products. Trade cards became increasingly popular and more decorative in the eighteenth century. The trade card of George and John Deane (Figure 6.1), for example, describes their trade, their location, and depicts an image of Monument Yard where the warehouse could be found.



**Figure 6.1: Trade Card of George and John Deane, c. 1800, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/DEANE.**

Walsh suggests that the primary motive of trade cards was to advertise their location and entice the consumer into the shop, where they were exposed to other forms of advertising.<sup>13</sup> This was more important in the late-eighteenth century as the shopping streets of London expanded, and became harder to navigate. Trade cards were also

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<sup>12</sup> R.B. Walker, "Advertising in London Newspapers, 1650-1750," *Business History* 2/15 (1973), 116.

<sup>13</sup> Walsh, "Shopping in Early Modern London," 146.

highly symbolic, and drew upon popular tropes, which had the potential to convey a wealth of information. Their imagery was often decorative in order to catch the eye of the public, but was also carefully constructed to be persuasive. Not only could they provide the consumer with information about price, products and production, but they also reflected and drew upon the knowledge held by the consumer and the wider public. Berg and Clifford show how advertising, through trade cards and a wide range of printed media, played an important role in communicating information to consumers about innovations.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to trade cards, producers and retailers also printed bill-heads to use when providing customers with invoices and receipts. Often these are categorised as trade cards within archival collections. Of the sample of 140 trade cards from the London Metropolitan Archives that were associated with the metalware trade that will be referred to in this chapter, 95 (68 percent) are representative of trade cards and 45 (32 percent) were bill-heads. Each type had their own purpose: the trade card was designed to advertise their products and retail space, and so contained more decoration and persuasive language; whilst the bill-head was designed to identify the place of purchase, from which the consumer had often purchased products under a credit arrangement, and so had to be reminded to settle their bill. Therefore, bill-heads varied in their level of detail. Most were relatively plain and simply had the name and address of the retailer, and occasionally an image of the shop or shop-sign, while others contained persuasive imagery and language like that found on trade cards.

As well as their trade card, George and John Deane also had a bill-head designed and printed for their Birmingham and Sheffield Warehouse (Figure 6.2). The design shows many similarities to their trade card (Figure 6.1), and repeats much of

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<sup>14</sup> Berg and Clifford, "Selling Consumption," 145-170.

the text and imagery. It would be wrong to completely separate these types of printed ephemera, as their use could be interchangeable.<sup>15</sup> Trade cards were often written-on and were used as receipts, and whilst they had less room to do so, bill-heads could also advertise to customers through language and imagery. It is therefore important to consider the circulation and shifting roles of these advertisements. As Philippa Hubbard emphasises, trade cards and bill-heads were not just inactive and discarded pieces of ephemera, but were actively circulated, exchanged and collected.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, trade cards and bill-heads remained exceptional and expensive items.



**Figure 6.2: Bill-Head of George and John Deane, c. 1800, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/DEANE.**

Advertising was, of course, not exclusive to the metalware trade. The full range of consumer goods and services were advertised. To name but a few, medicines and textiles were regularly the subject of a variety of ephemera and print media, and have

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<sup>15</sup> It is also important to be aware of the different forms and functions that trade cards and bill-heads had. Some trade cards acted as bill-heads, whilst others were used as labels. Larger examples that are also listed in the archives as ‘trade cards’, acted more like broadsheets that might be placed in a shop window or displayed on the wall of a shop, tavern or coffee house.

<sup>16</sup> Hubbard, “Trade Cards in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Consumer Culture,” 30.

received the interest of historians over the past decades.<sup>17</sup> Victoria Morgan highlights the three types of advertisement that were most frequently seen in provincial newspapers: patent medicines, published books and magazines, and local tradesmen.<sup>18</sup> Metalware advertisements were less common on the whole, but still occurred, especially in newspapers that were published in Birmingham or Sheffield such as *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*. As previously discussed, they were only one part of wider advertising and marketing strategies within the metalware trade. Literature has shown that advertising should be seen more broadly within business and marketing strategies, and has explored the development of packaging, and the manipulation of audiences and consumers.<sup>19</sup> Connections have also been drawn between eighteenth-century 'shop signs and a more general emphasis on commodity display', with nineteenth century developments in printing technology and posters, and the modern use of outdoor advertising spaces.<sup>20</sup>

## 6.2 Marketing the New and the Old

The proliferation of new goods and materials in the metalware trade in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries uniquely influenced the marketing and

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<sup>17</sup> Patrick Wallis, "Consumption, Retailing, and Medicine in Early-Modern London," *Economic History Review* 61/1 (2008): 26-53; and Beverly Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite: The Cotton Trade and the Consumer in Britain, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), especially chapter 5.

<sup>18</sup> Morgan, "Beyond the Boundary of the Shop," 67.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew P. McAllister and Emily West, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Advertising and Promotional Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), especially the introduction.

<sup>20</sup> Anne M. Cronin, *Advertising, Commercial Spaces and the Urban* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 3.

advertising of consumer goods.<sup>21</sup> New products co-existed with the existing range of luxury objects, everyday items and second-hand goods, which led to a new emphasis upon product variety, innovation and fashionability. As Barbara Bettoni has shown in her study of the metalware trade in Italy, the introduction of ‘new luxuries’, products and materials sparked a debate about product quality, in which the importance of novelty and fashionability overtook the intrinsic value of raw materials.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, it is important to consider both expensive and decorative luxury goods, new products and materials, and the lower-end of the market and practical hardware items. There were similar strategies used for the marketing and advertising of each type of product. Moreover, the impact of new products and materials on the marketing and advertising of metalware influenced wider definitions of quality. Most historians have focused upon the marketing of luxury goods, and the emergence of ‘populuxe’ and semi-luxury goods, whilst the advertising of plainer, more practical products has received less discussion.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, both luxury and non-luxury goods were often advertised

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<sup>21</sup> As shown in chapters 3 and 4, notable innovations in the metalware trade included the development of new materials such as Sheffield plate, pinchbeck and ormolu, and new technology such as die stamping.

<sup>22</sup> Barbara Bettoni, “Usefulness, Ornamental Function and Novelty: Debates on Quality in Button and Buckle Manufacturing in Northern Italy (Eighteenth to Nineteenth Centuries),” in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture, 1500-1900*, ed. Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 171-207; and Barbara Bettoni, “Fashion, Tradition, and Innovation in Button Manufacturing in Early Modern Italy,” *Technology and Culture* 55/3 (2014): 675-710.

<sup>23</sup> Cissie Fairchild, “The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods in Eighteenth Century Paris,” in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1994), 228-248; and Carolyn Sargentson, “The Manufacture and Marketing of Luxury Goods: The Marchands Merciers of late 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century Paris,” in *Luxury Trades and Consumerism in Ancien Régime Paris: Studies in the History of the Skilled Workforce*, ed. Robert Fox and Anthony Turner (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 99-139.

in similar ways, not least through the methods that were used and their emphasis upon the quality of the producers, retailers and products.

The different types of metalware have been discussed by historians as ‘old’ luxuries and ‘new’ luxuries, a distinction put forward by Jan de Vries. According to de Vries, old luxury conveyed ‘grandeur or exquisite refinement’ and so if emulated were ‘obvious falsifications’, whilst new luxury goods prioritised ‘comfort and enjoyment’.<sup>24</sup> However, the division between ‘old’ and ‘new’ luxuries was not always clear. Silver had long been used as a traditional display of wealth and power, or as a means of ‘value storing’, but was also regularly melted down and re-fashioned into new products and designs.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, new technologies that created ‘new luxuries’ did not sacrifice quality, and in many cases even improved quality, as emphasised by the Birmingham and Sheffield producers whose innovations made this possible.<sup>26</sup>

In order for new products to be accepted, they had to position themselves in the market alongside existing products and materials. While consumers enjoyed new and exciting curiosities, new products were only accepted when the consumer understood how to use them, and were satisfied by their use value and sign value.<sup>27</sup> As John Styles explains, successful objects combined the new with the familiar.<sup>28</sup> Styles

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<sup>24</sup> Jan de Vries, “Luxury in the Dutch Golden Age in Theory and Practice,” in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, ed. Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 43.

<sup>25</sup> Bruno Blondé and Ilja Van Damme, “Fashioning Old and New or Moulding the Material Culture of Europe (Late Seventeenth-Early Nineteenth Centuries),” in *Fashioning Old and New: Changing Consumer Patterns in Western Europe, 1650-1900*, ed. Bruno Blondé, Natasha Coquery, Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 9.

<sup>26</sup> As shown in chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>27</sup> John Styles, “Product Innovation in Early Modern London,” *Past & Present* 168 (2000): 124-169.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.



demonstrates how across different trades, including the metalware, furniture and textiles trades, producers integrated new goods into the market whilst also differentiating them and making them stand out from their competition; for example, new silver teapots were made in similar designs to existing coffee pots.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the advertising and marketing of new products and materials was not isolated from the sale of the wider range of existing products in the market. In most cases, new objects were sold alongside a variety of other products, ready-made designs and even second-hand goods.<sup>30</sup>

Because of the need to inform the public about innovations in production and technology, the target audience for the advertising of metalware was not always the end consumer. Producers and retailers circulated information to make the public familiar with, and improve the reputation of, new materials and products. In doing so, they advertised to the wider public, as well as members of the nobility and social elite. Noble patronage was a powerful marketing tool, and gaining the support of influential and trusted figures reassured the public of the respectability and fashionability of producers and their products.<sup>31</sup> Producers often used heraldic imagery on their trade cards and emphasised when they had obtained royal or noble patronage.<sup>32</sup> This

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>30</sup> Jon Stobart, "In and Out of Fashion? Advertising Novel and Second-hand Goods in Georgian England," in *Fashioning Old and New: Changing Consumer Patterns in Western Europe, 1650-1900*, ed. Bruno Blondé and Natasha Coquery (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 136.

<sup>31</sup> Hannah Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), especially chapter 1.

<sup>32</sup> For example, the trade card of the button manufacturer Walter Williams displayed heraldic imagery and made the claim that he was 'button manufacturer to his Majesty & Royal Family'. London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/WILLIAMS, Trade Card of Walter Williams.

occurred across all trades, but was especially important within the metalware trade and in the expanding regional manufacturing towns, such as Birmingham and Sheffield, whose producers led the way in inventing new products and materials.<sup>33</sup>

One such innovation in the metalware trade was ormolu, a form of gilt brass that combined ground gold with mercury to produce an effect that was imitative of gold. Initially invented in France, it was Matthew Boulton who developed the production of ormolu on a larger scale in England, and persevered in his attempts to market this innovation in the hope that it might be a success.<sup>34</sup> Boulton actively circulated information and appealed to the public through a series of advertisements. One draft advertisement, presumably for a newspaper, wrote that ‘Mr Boulton begs leave to acquaint ye Nobility & Gentry that... he has extended & improved the Bronze manufacture of vases, clock cases, candle branches & various other pieces of ornamental furniture in the antique last, finished in ormoulu’.<sup>35</sup> Boulton therefore appealed to the public, and more specifically to the ‘nobility & gentry’, to keep them informed about new improvements and the range of products. This did not guarantee a product’s success. As Kenneth Quickenden argues, the ormolu experiment failed, and Boulton was not able to profit from this innovation, possibly because it was marketed at too high a price for consumers who were uncertain of its value.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> As demonstrated in chapter 3.

<sup>34</sup> Nicholas Goodison, “Ormolu Ornaments,” in *Matthew Boulton: Selling what all the World Desires*, ed. Shena Mason (London: Birmingham City Council in association with Yale University Press, 2009), 55-63; and Nicholas Goodison, *Matthew Boulton: Ormolu* (London: Christie’s, 2002).

<sup>35</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/2/31, Letter Book 1768-73, ‘Draft advertisement for Or moulu’, f. 48.

<sup>36</sup> Kenneth Quickenden, “Boulton and Fothergill Silver,” Unpublished PhD Thesis, Westfield College, 1990, 25.

Nevertheless, Boulton was able to develop his reputation for innovative and exciting new products, and his relationships with the nobility.

### **6.3 The Language of Quality**

As well as being informative, the marketing and advertising of metalware was intended to be persuasive. Producers and retailers paid good money to print advertisements in newspapers, trade cards, bill-heads, and labels, and so wanted to ensure that they would appeal to the consumer to encourage them to purchase their products. Linguistically and visually, they needed to draw upon the concerns and priorities of the consumers, whilst emphasising their strengths and differences from their competition. A closer look at the language used in the sample of 140 metalware trade cards and bill-heads from the London Metropolitan Archives can help us better understand the priorities of retailers, producers, and consumers. As shown by Table 6.1, several key themes, and visual and linguistic conventions, emerge.<sup>37</sup> Not only were there reoccurring references to product variety and innovation, but also to price, quality, aspects of production such as workmanship, details of the retailer and whether the products were sold wholesale or retail, the shop's location, and the fashionability and taste of the products. These linguistic and visual conventions were not exclusive to trade cards, but occurred across all types of advertisements and reflected wider marketing strategies.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> In this table I have analysed the language of the 95 metalware trade cards from the London Metropolitan Archives collection. I have omitted the 45 bill-heads because many of them had very little information other than the name and address of the producer.

<sup>38</sup> Stobart, "In and Out of Fashion?" 136. As Stobart demonstrates, newspaper advertisements were focused around similar themes, in particular the reputation of the trader;

**Table 6.1: What was Advertised on Metalware Trade Cards, c. 1710-1800.**

<b>What was Advertised</b>	<b>Number of Trade Cards</b>	<b>% of all Trade Cards</b>
Location	86	91%
Product Range	65	68%
Retail	56	59%
Production	46	48%
Price	35	37%
Quality	22	23%
Fashion	17	18%
Innovation	10	11%

Source: 95 metalware trade cards from the London Metropolitan Archives collection dated between 1710 and 1800.

It is important to acknowledge the difficulties in analysing the language used in advertising and marketing. Nancy Cox emphasises that linguistic choices changed over time, as did their meanings, so it is difficult to understand exactly what message was intended.<sup>39</sup> Although it is useful to distinguish between each of the marketing strategies for ease of analysis, in reality they were more fluid and less distinct. Quality was not just conveyed explicitly by advertising that a producer sold ‘the best quality’ metalware, but was also communicated by claiming to have the most advanced innovations, the ‘neatest’ workmanship, or the most ‘tasteful’ products. These linguistic conventions appealed to those people that historians have described as the ‘polite society’ of the eighteenth century - the emerging middling-sort who developed wider polite and genteel discourses and a new material and intellectual culture.<sup>40</sup>

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the addressing of friends or the public; fashion or taste; references to London; and second-hand goods.

<sup>39</sup> Nancy Cox, *Retailing and the Language of Goods, 1550-1820* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 23.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), especially chapter 3; and Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (London: Yale University Press, 1998), 13.

The conventions spread across the advertising and marketing of different products or materials, whether it was an everyday good, a luxury item or an object for the expanding middling consumer. As Table 6.2 shows, both luxury goods and hardware items advertised the same themes and used similar language and imagery.

**Table 6.2: What was Advertised on Trade Cards, Divided between Luxury and Hardware Metalware Trade Cards, c. 1710-1800.**

Theme on Trade Card	Type of Metalware			
	Luxury		Hardware	
	No.	%	No.	%
Location	46	92	39	89
Product Range	36	71	29	66
Retail	28	55	28	64
Production	30	59	16	36
Price	19	37	16	36
Quality	8	16	14	32
Fashion	10	20	7	16
Innovation	3	6	7	16
<b>Total No. of Trade Cards</b>	51		44	

Source: 95 metalware trade cards from the London Metropolitan Archives collection dated between 1710 and 1800. I have divided metalware into luxury goods and hardware. Luxury goods include goldsmiths, silversmiths, watch makers and jewellers; Hardware includes ironmongers, braziers, tin-makers, plate manufacturers and cutlers.<sup>41</sup>

Fashion, for example, which was seen as a crucial factor in the marketing of luxury goods, was of similar importance in the advertising of new materials and durable hardware products. As shown earlier in this chapter, this division between luxury and hardware was increasingly difficult to define. The ‘new’ luxuries that entered the market in the eighteenth century made this division between luxury and non-luxury

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<sup>41</sup> For an expanded discussion of the contemporary understanding of ‘hardware’, see chapter 3.

goods even more complex; moreover, an increasing number of retailers sold a wider range of goods, which sometimes included high-end and low-end, luxury and hardware items.

Price has traditionally been seen as the driving force behind consumer choice, particularly within economic theory: Philippe Minard argues that price became one of the most important aspects of eighteenth-century advertising, retailing and consumption.<sup>42</sup> However, this analysis of the marketing of metalware suggests that this was not the case within the metalware trade, where price was discussed relatively infrequently. Only 35 (37 percent) of the trade cards from the London Metropolitan Archive collection emphasised goods that were of the ‘lowest price’ or the most ‘reasonable rates’. Jon Stobart has similarly demonstrated that price was rarely used to advertise a wide range of consumer goods in newspaper advertisements.<sup>43</sup>

As the rest of this chapter shows, the sample of trade cards instead emphasised quality, product range and details about production. These trends often changed over time: trade cards became more detailed across the eighteenth century; price became less important; and quality became increasingly important in the marketing of metalware. Each producer or retailer chose a different approach, whether to emphasise their fashionability, their lowest prices or their innovative and unique designs. The most important message seemed to be that the producer or retailer had a range of products to choose from, and possessed the quality or qualities that the consumer desired. By looking more closely at each of the visual and linguistic conventions that were used in the marketing and advertising of metalware, it is possible to get a more

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<sup>42</sup> Philippe Minard, “Facing Uncertainty: Markets, Norms and Conventions in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Regulating the British Economy, 1660-1850*, ed. Perry Gauci (London: Ashgate, 2011), 177-194.

<sup>43</sup> Stobart, “In and Out of Fashion?” 138.

accurate picture of how metalware was marketed and was perceived by the consumer and the wider public. Moreover, it gives a better understanding of the driving forces behind methods of production and marketing strategies, and how quality was created, communicated and defined.

It was crucial for producers and retailers to persuade consumers and the wider public of the quality of their products in order to establish a good reputation. The quality of products and of people were inextricably linked.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, producers and retailers regularly claimed to sell ‘the best’ metalware, or objects that were ‘superior’, ‘fine’ and ‘extraordinary’. Explicit references to product quality were more frequent within the hardware trades, seen in 32 percent of the sample of trade cards, than the luxury trades, seen in 16 percent of the sample (Table 6.2). Quality could also be advertised implicitly through the depiction of objects in images on advertisements, discussions of product variety, innovation, details about production and fashion, which all acted to improve the reputation and the perceived quality of producers, retailers and their products.

## **6.4 Retailing**

Priority on trade cards and newspaper advertisements was given to providing details about the location and retail services of the producer or retailer.<sup>45</sup> This is only understandable when the primary aim of the trade card or advertisement was to attract

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<sup>44</sup> Michael Kwass, “Ordering the World of Goods: Consumer Revolution and the Classification of Objects in Eighteenth Century France,” *Representations* 82/1 (2003), 88.

<sup>45</sup> The location of the shop or retail space was emphasised in 91% of the sample of trade cards, and more detail was provided about the retail services they provided in 59% (Table 6.1).

consumers to the retail premises, and so consumers had to know where to find them.<sup>46</sup> This is echoed by Berg and Clifford, who argue that it was the main aim of advertisements to ‘reinforce a business image and reputation rather than particular wares’, with an emphasis upon the shop space.<sup>47</sup> Many of the trade cards also drew upon the imagery of the shop sign, or location, at which the shop could be found. For example, Figures 6.1 and 6.2, the trade card and bill-head of George and John Deane seen earlier in this chapter, displayed an image of Monument, the location in London at which the Birmingham and Sheffield warehouse could be found. In many cases, the only image on a trade card or bill-head was the shop sign.

The location and design of the shop signs were often intertwined with the trade of the shop and the products that were sold, for instance, a goldsmith might have a shop at the sign of the golden ewer, or a clockmaker at the sign of the dial.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the location and the role of the shop sign was connected to the advertising of particular products and were a way to make them memorable to the consumer. Trade cards were typically exchanged at the sale of a product, and so were designed to remind existing consumers of the location and services of a retailer.<sup>49</sup> Shop signs and locations were also connected with quality and fashionability, as particular streets or shopping areas became fashionable and developed their reputation for quality production. Location was an important choice, and when deciding upon where to build his show room,

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<sup>46</sup> Walsh, “Shopping in Early Modern London,” 146.

<sup>47</sup> Berg and Clifford, “Selling Consumption,” 149-151.

<sup>48</sup> David Garrioch, “House Names, Shop Signs and Social Organization in Western European Cities, 1500-1900,” *Urban History* 21/1 (1994): 20-48.

<sup>49</sup> Berg and Clifford, “Selling Consumption,” 151.



Boulton specifically wanted it to be opened in ‘covent garden, Southampton street, charing x or Mall, St James St, or... in New bond Street’.<sup>50</sup>

It was also important to advertise the type of retail space, and the sorts of retail services they provided, for example whether they sold wholesale or retail, produced their own products or sourced products from regional producers. It was not only producers who had new opportunities to advertise and market their products, but also a diverse range of retailers, agents and warehousemen.<sup>51</sup> Not everyone involved in the production process was represented through the advertisement, and often it was not the actual producer at all. The trade card of John Bright (Figure 6.3) clearly advertises that Bright was not the producer, but that the premises was a ‘ware-room’.<sup>52</sup> Bright’s trade card communicates that his ware-room in London was a retailer of Sheffield plate and a range of goods sourced from different producers across the country.

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<sup>50</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/19, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1770, ‘Mr Boulton. My ideas of a Theka in London’, 1770.

<sup>51</sup> Claire Walsh, “Stalls, Bulks, Shops and Long-Term Change in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth Century England,” in *The Landscape of Consumption: Shopping Streets and Cultures in Western Europe, 1600-1900*, ed. Jan Hein Furnée and Clé Lesger (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 37-56.

<sup>52</sup> As shown in chapter 7, retail spaces were increasingly called ‘warehouses’ and ‘ware-rooms’ because these terms were associated with fashionability. See also Helen Berry, “Polite Consumption: Shopping in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002), 383.



**Figure 6.3: Trade Card of John Bright, c. 1796, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/BRIGHT.**

Therefore, not only were ware-rooms associated with fashionability, but they were seen as retail spaces that could provide a wide range of consumer goods. Warehouses could be found in fashionable towns across the country, such as Bath, where a regional newspaper advertised:

Evill's London, Sheffield and Birmingham Ware-house at the Golden Cup. Opposite the White-Lion in the Market-place, Are sold, wholesale and retail, all sorts of clocks, gold, silver and pinchbeck watches made by the best of workmen, and warranted good; all sorts of large and small plate, made and sold at London prices; jewellery goods of all kinds; a fresh and good assortment of plated goods of the Sheffield manufactory, plated on copper, steel and iron.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup> *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 6 December 1764.

Advertising the type of retail space was also important because it often clarified the target consumer. Warehouses often sold in large quantities to other producers, retailers or merchants, rather than selling individual products to a typical consumer.

Advertisements in newspapers and messages on trade cards were frequently used by producers and retailers to develop their reputation and personal relationships with consumers. They communicated changes in the location, or ownership of a particular business, both to existing consumers and the wider public. Most often, this was on the death of the previous owner. Often, advertisements were disguised as news items in order to appear more respectable and tasteful, which was also a way to avoid the advertisement tax.<sup>54</sup> One newspaper advertisement wrote that:

Joseph Garrison, Brazier and Tin Plate Worker, who succeeds the late Mr George Birch in his shop No 140, in Digbeth, Birmingham, humbly requests the favour of those noblemen, gentlemen, and others who were customers of the said Mr Birch, and intreat that they will make trial of him in those branches.<sup>55</sup>

Producers spent their working lives developing a client base and good reputation. Therefore, upon the change of ownership, the new owner would wish to capitalise on that. The advertisement might also be a subtle way of informing previous customers who still needed to pay their bills that these debts would be transferred to the new owner. Another retailer, Edward Baker, a Brazier, and Tin Plate Worker, used an advertisement to inform ‘his friends, and the public in general, that he has purchased

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<sup>54</sup> Walker, “Advertising in London Newspapers,” 129.

<sup>55</sup> *Aris’s Birmingham Gazette*, Issue 1573 (13 January 1772).

all the stock in trade of Mr Smith, consisting of cast iron, and ironmongery goods to which he purposes carrying on in addition to the Brazieri and Tin Plate working business'.<sup>56</sup> During the advertising and marketing of metalware, it was crucial to not only communicate to the public through print, but to develop relationships in person.

## 6.5 Product Range

Producers and retailers aimed to develop their reputation for producing or selling a wide variety of goods, and regularly emphasised their product range in their advertisements.<sup>57</sup> Consumers expected an increasing variety of goods across all trades in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but this variety was especially prominent in the metalware trade because of the range of new products and materials that were developed.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, the expansion of the trade and the co-existence of old and new luxuries, hardware, and second-hand goods, placed a greater emphasis upon variety, which was increasingly associated with quality.

To a certain extent, the detailing of product range was simply informative. After all, the public needed to know where they could purchase different goods. However, product range was also linked to the types of retail spaces. In an advertisement published in the *London Evening Post* in 1782, John Nodes advertised an extensive range of goods at his 'Goldsmiths, Toy, China and Tea Warehouse'. The advertisement listed that he:

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<sup>56</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 4 July 1791.

<sup>57</sup> Product range was emphasised linguistically and visually in 68% of the sample of trade cards (Table 6.1).

<sup>58</sup> As outlined earlier in this chapter and in chapter 3.

Selleth all sorts of large and small plate, Gold and silver watches, wedding and funeral rings, great variety of fine toys in Gold, silver, mother of pearl, tortoise shell, & c. viz. snuff-boxes, cases of instruments, equipages, India and English artificial flowers. Great choice of Dutch and English Toys, London, Birmingham and Sheffield Cutlery Wares; Javelins, Swords, and other Things necessary for sheriffs. Together with great variety of fine China Ware, and all sorts of flint glass at Eight-pence per pound and coffee tea and chocolate...<sup>59</sup>

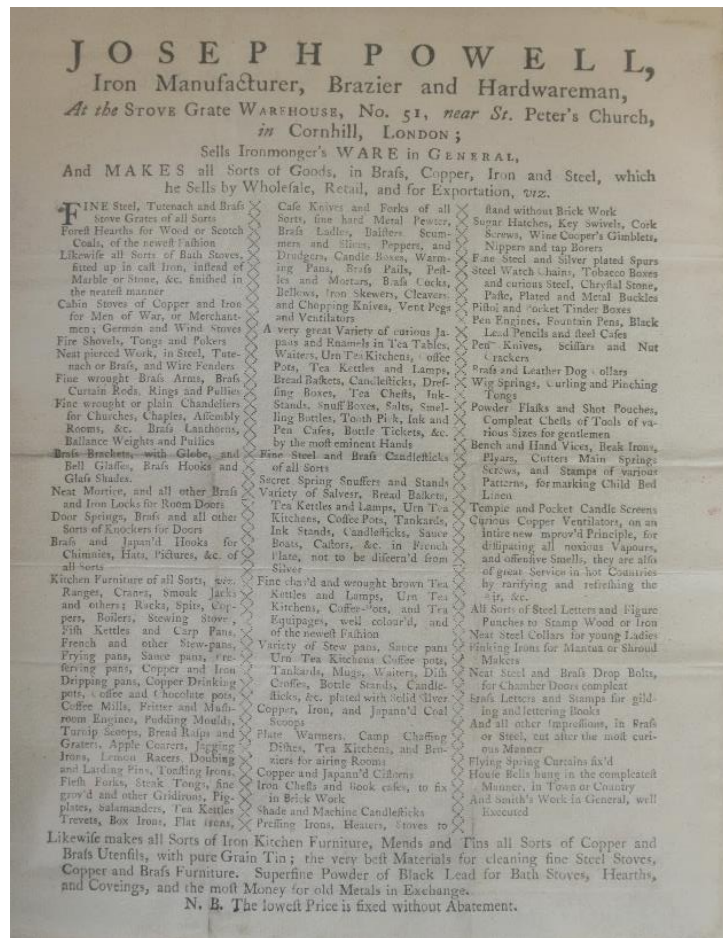
As a retailer and warehouseman, rather than a manufacturer, Nodes was able to retail a wide range of products. Not only did he sell different products and materials, including metalware, glass and china, but he was also able to sell products that had been imported from regional towns including Birmingham and Sheffield cutlery wares, and foreign countries, such as Dutch toys. The trend for emphasising product range became so great that one newspaper advertisement in 1764 ended an already extensive list of products by stating ‘... and a great variety of other articles too tedious to mention’.<sup>60</sup> In particular, it was the rise of the ‘toy’ trade in Birmingham and Sheffield in the eighteenth century and the increasing popularity of new luxuries, novelties and exotic importations, that encouraged this expansion of consumer choice.

This increasing variety of products and materials was also advertised through trade cards. Product range could be represented linguistically or visually, seen in the trade cards of Joseph Powell (Figure 6.4) and Richard Boulton (Figure 6.5).

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<sup>59</sup> *London Evening Post*, Issue 1782 (24-26 July 1740).

<sup>60</sup> *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 6 December 1764.



**Figure 6.4: Trade Card of Joseph Powell, 1776, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/PCC/POWELL.**

The 1776 trade card of Powell (Figure 6.4) was heavily text based and listed their range of different products and materials.<sup>61</sup> The trade card may not be decorative, but even without reading the list it is able to boldly convey the message that they provide consumers with a wide choice. As Fern Johnson explains, ‘language evokes the visual’, therefore the large amount of text and lists of descriptions were also able to

<sup>61</sup> I have referred to Figure 6.4 as a trade card, which is how it is listed in the London Metropolitan Archives. However, unlike many of the other trade cards discussed in this chapter, this is a larger example that was likely used as a broadsheet and would have been displayed on the wall or in a window of a shop, tavern or coffee house.



visually convey the variety of goods.<sup>62</sup> Richard Boulton's trade card (Figure 6.5) reflects a similarly wide choice of objects and designs. It visually depicts a variety of objects from decorative vases and plates, to useful saucepans and scissors, and more specialist watches. Like many of the trade cards, it also emphasises this in the accompanying text by repeating phrases such as 'all sorts' and 'all other' alongside the list of objects and materials. Therefore, text and language worked together to communicate messages about product variety.

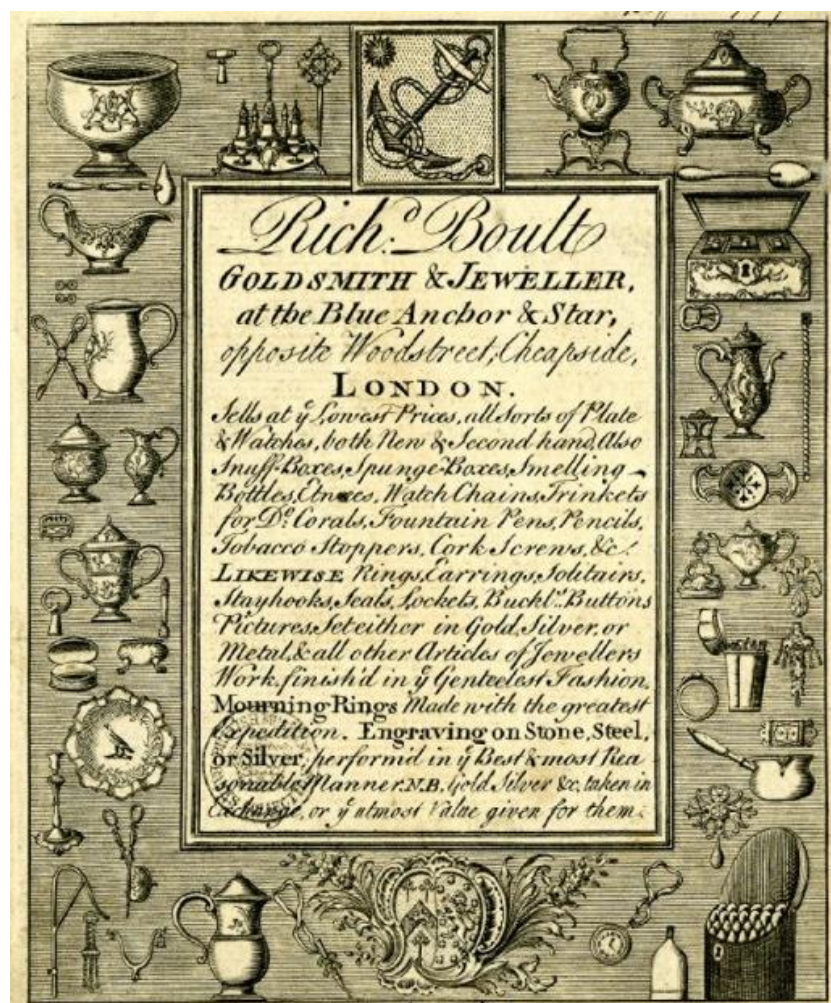


Figure 6.5: Trade card of Richard Boulton, c. 1760-1818, British Museum, D2.1692.

<sup>62</sup> Fern L. Johnson, *Imaging in Advertising: Verbal and Visual Codes of Commerce* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 3.

The emphasis of producers and retailers on their diverse product range can also be seen by the varied trade identities of producers and retailers that were listed on the sample of trade cards and bill-heads. As seen by Table 6.3, most retailers or producers in the eighteenth century identified as having multiple trades or occupations.<sup>63</sup> Only 40 (29 percent) of the metalware trade cards and bill-heads from the sample listed a single trade, whilst 100 (71 percent) listed more than one trade. Four trade cards listed as many as six trades.

**Table 6.3: Number of Trades Listed on Metalware Trade Cards and Bill-Heads c. 1710-1800.**

<b>Number of Trades Listed</b>	<b>Number of Trade Cards in which that Number of Trades is Listed</b>	<b>% of Total Metalware Trade Cards and Bill-heads</b>
1	40	29
2	28	20
3	44	31
4	17	12
5	7	5
6	4	3

Source: 140 Metalware trade cards and bill-heads from the London Metropolitan Archives collection dated between 1710 and 1800.

The types of trades that were listed were equally varied. The most frequent occupations that were listed within the metalware trade were goldsmiths, jewellers and ironmongers. Whilst some trades were more frequently paired than others, such as goldsmiths, jewellers and watch makers, there were more unexpected pairings, for example, the partnership Golding & Son's 1780 trade card claimed they were an

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<sup>63</sup> See also, David Barnett, *London, Hub of the Industrial Revolution: A Revisionary History 1775-1825* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1998), 77.



‘ironmonger, case maker and perfumer’.<sup>64</sup> As Nancy Cox demonstrates in her analysis of the language of retailing, these labels and sub-divisions of the trade were not fixed.<sup>65</sup> They changed over time, therefore must be read with caution.<sup>66</sup> However, it shows a clear and deliberate emphasis upon product variety and the broad trade identities of producers and retailers. One explanation returns to the expanding retail networks. Many of these trade cards were published by warehousemen, agents or retailers, rather than the producers themselves, so they were able to source a wide range of goods.

Yet, focusing on the role of retailing tells only one part of the story. The repeated emphasis of product variety was also connected to changes in the production of metalware in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>67</sup> As shown by Maxine Berg, Charles Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin, producers utilised a flexible organisation of production in order to produce an increasing range of goods.<sup>68</sup> Workmen were employed on short term contracts, and more specialised tasks were subcontracted as and when they were needed, which allowed manufacturers and workshops to adapt product designs and materials with new fashions. Furthermore, the similarity in the

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<sup>64</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/GOLDING, Trade Card of Golding & Son, 1780.

<sup>65</sup> Cox, *Retailing and the Language of Goods*, 23.

<sup>66</sup> It must also be noted that this is one specific collection of trade cards, and so it is difficult to say how representative these trade cards are. The sample might be limited by the choices of subsequent collectors, who might have only kept the most decorative trade cards. Also, advertising in print would have been expensive, and so smaller businesses or trades which produced cheaper goods, might not have invested in trade cards.

<sup>67</sup> As demonstrated in chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.

<sup>68</sup> Maxine Berg, “Commerce and Creativity in Eighteenth-Century Birmingham,” in *Markets and Manufacture in Early Industrial Europe*, ed. Maxine Berg (London: Routledge, 1991), 173-204; and Charles Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin, eds., *World of Possibilities: Flexibility and Mass Production in Western Industrialization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

production of toys and other small consumer goods, such as buttons and buckles meant that tools and skills could easily be applied to different designs and materials. The rise of die stamping in the eighteenth century further added to this flexibility, as they could be used with different materials, and producers or consumers could pick-and-choose the design of each different parts of an object. Each label and trade identity therefore encompassed a wide range of skills and materials: tin plate workers often made lamps, and also dealt in lamp oils; jewellers would possess skills to work with precious stones as well as metals; and toy-men also deal in small objects of other materials including glass, ceramics and textiles.<sup>69</sup>

Advertising the range of goods was a crucial part of the marketing of metalware. This included the full variety of new luxuries, existing products and practical hardware items. Instead of reflecting changes in marketing, this emphasis upon product variety reflects the expansion of retail networks and changes in the organisation of production. Rather than being specialists in just one trade or object, retailers were able to source a broader range of objects than had previously been seen, and producers possessed a range of flexible skills or the organisational structure to outsource work to workers with the relevant skills.

## **6.6 Production**

The advertising and marketing of metalware was also intertwined with changes in the production of metalware because it regularly included details about producers and

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<sup>69</sup> Liliane Hilaire-Pérez and Catherine Verna, “Dissemination of Technical Knowledge in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era: New Approaches and Methodological Issues,” *Technology and Culture* 47/3 (2006), 536; and Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), especially 157.

methods of production.<sup>70</sup> Producers and retailers cultivated the popular perception of production and established their reputation as the providers of quality metalware.<sup>71</sup> They used images and descriptions of production in the advertising and marketing of metalware, including discussions of workmanship, the depiction of workmen and their tools on trade cards, and information about patented inventions in newspaper advertisements. This built upon knowledge that the consumer already possessed and the consumer curiosity and interest in production. The manufactured product had become fashionable and desirable. This suggests that consumers possessed an understanding of the production of metalware, and that metalware was marketed with this in mind.

When the producer was also the retailer of their goods, this was made clear in their advertisement. Many trade cards explicitly wrote ‘working goldsmith’ or ‘he being the maker’ to demonstrate that they were the producer.<sup>72</sup> Other aspects of the production process were also regularly repeated, such as the quality of a producer’s workmanship. Consumers often had an understanding of what was needed to make a

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<sup>70</sup> Details about production, or images of production, were included in 48% of the sample of trade cards (Table 6.1).

<sup>71</sup> Rachael Morton, “Perceptions of Production and the Retailing and Marketing of Quality Metalware in Eighteenth-Century England,” *History of Retailing and Consumption* 2/2 (2016): 143-163. This builds upon research by Kate Smith into how ceramics manufacturers influenced the popular perception of production in the ceramics trade. See Kate Smith, *Material Goods, Moving Hands: Perceiving Production in England, 1700-1830* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014); and Kate Smith, “The Potter’s Skill: Perceptions of Workmanship in the English Ceramic Industries, 1760-1800,” Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, May 2010.

<sup>72</sup> As I will show in chapter 7, producers who retailed their own goods claimed to be a greater guarantee of quality than retailers who were middle-men, because they had direct control over the production process and they often marked their goods which acted as a guarantee of quality.

product of good quality. Across trade cards and newspaper advertisements for metalware, there was a particular emphasis upon the repair of goods that was to be done ‘in the neatest manner’.<sup>73</sup> Engravings were similarly described to be finished ‘neatly’.<sup>74</sup> There were therefore certain skills that were desirable to the consumer, and these were emphasised when metalware was advertised.

A number of trade cards also displayed images of producers at work alongside descriptions of production. For instance, the trade cards of the cutler W. Baker (Figure 6.6), and the goldsmith Stewart (Figure 6.7).



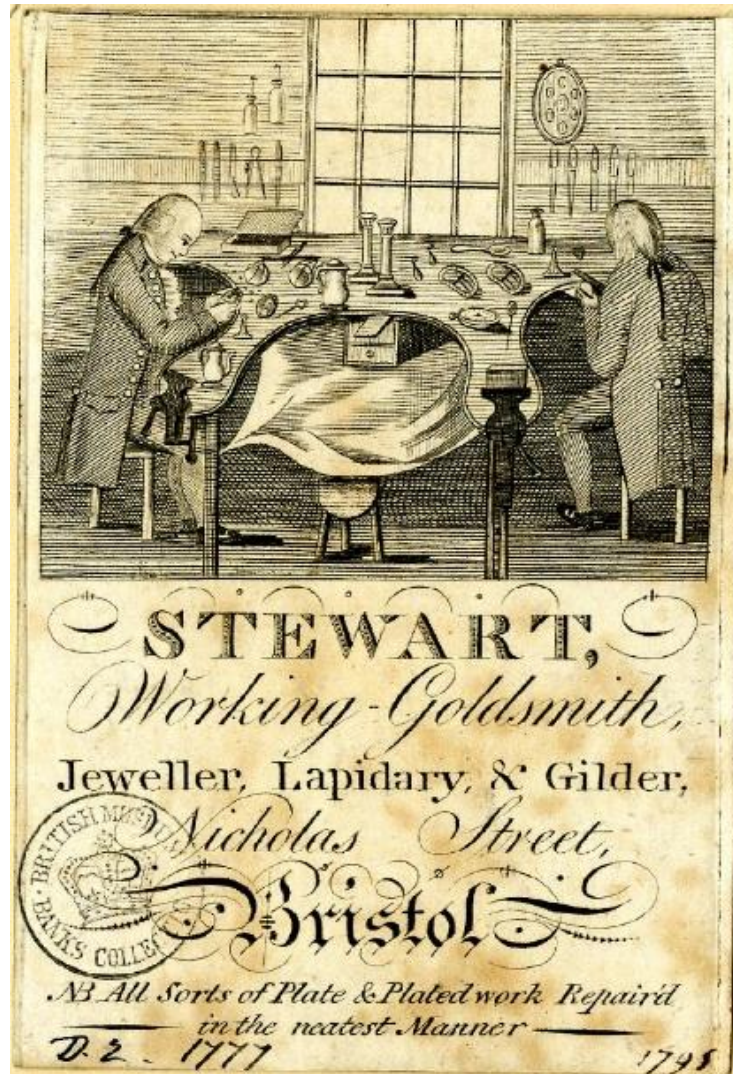
**Figure 6.6: Trade Card of W. Baker, c. 1800, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/BAKER.**

<sup>73</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/STONEW122, Trade Card of John Stone, 1765.

<sup>74</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/STONEW121, Trade Card of John Stone, 1765.

Both are described respectively as a ‘working cutler’ and ‘working goldsmith’, thus emphasising their status as producers who retailed their own goods. Baker’s trade card depicts a representation of production, with one worker stood turning a large wheel, and another sat at a grindstone filing a blade. Whilst the objects themselves are not seen in the workshop, they are spread across the rest of the trade card, bordering the central image of production. Like many other trade cards, Baker appealed to the consumer’s desire for variety, by including multiple images of objects and claims that he produced and repaired ‘all sorts of cutlery’. Baker also emphasised the quality of his products and his workmanship. Not only is the workmanship and skill of the producer demonstrated visually in the image, but messages around the border of the trade card reinforced Baker’s message that his goods were ‘neatly executed’ and ‘ground & repaired in the best manner’. Therefore, it sought to establish his reputation as a producer-retailer of variety, but also of quality metalware, which was directly associated with his skill as a producer.

Stewart’s trade card (Figure 6.7) similarly depicts two men sat at a workbench, with their attention focused on the objects and tools in their hands. The table is spread with a variety of objects, including buckles, a pair of candlesticks and a watch, and there are several tools and files that are hung by the window. Like Baker, Stewart attempted to market his business by appealing to consumers who wanted both old and new luxuries, and a broader choice of metalware that was also produced to a high standard. These advertisements aimed to capitalise on the public imagination, and to appeal to a potential consumer. By emphasising production, linguistically and visually, they established a perception of production that connected the producer-retailer to product variety and desirable, good-quality metalware.



**Figure 6.7: Trade Card of Stewart, c. 1795, British Museum, D2.1777.**

This representation was most probably a constructed and idealised image of production. It is difficult to know what role the producer played in designing the trade card, and it was likely the engraver of the card who played the biggest role in creating the image. Furthermore, images were often repeated. For example, a very similar image of the production of cutlery to that on W. Baker's trade card, was used on the trade card of Mr Looker, to whom Baker was once the foreman.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>75</sup> British Museum, D2.117, Draft trade card of Mr Looker, Cutler and Razor-Maker, 1760-1818.

The images on the trade cards of Baker and Stewart (Figures 6.6 and 6.7) also held implicit messages about the workmanship and skill of the producer. Each of the images promotes the respectability and status of the producers, clearly showing them to be smartly dressed and well presented, in contrast to the less skilled and more casually dressed worker turning the wheel in the image of the cutler's workshop (Figure 6.6). Trade cards aimed to advertise the quality of workmanship. The goldsmith William Brown's trade card advertised that their products were produced and engraved by the 'best hands in London'.<sup>76</sup> These claims of quality craftsmanship were often tailored to the type of metalware that was advertised. Of the sample of trade cards, references to the production or the producers of metalware was more frequent within the luxury side of the trade (seen in 59 percent of the trade cards) than the hardware side (seen in 36 percent), as shown in Table 6.2. However, within the luxury trades it seemed to be more important to convey the quality and respectability of the producer's skill, while details within the hardware trades were more specific about the purity of tin, or the strength of workmanship of plated goods.

This investigation into how production was perceived builds upon recent research by Kate Smith into Josiah Wedgwood's showrooms and the marketing and retail of ceramics.<sup>77</sup> Smith has shown that the eighteenth century was 'an age that prided itself on curiosity towards and knowledge of the material world'.<sup>78</sup> Whilst there are many parallels between the marketing strategies of successful manufacturers such as Wedgwood and Matthew Boulton, there were different material and social contexts. It was especially difficult to observe the quality and material composition of

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<sup>76</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/BROWN, Trade Card of William Brown, 1771.

<sup>77</sup> Smith, "The Potter's Skill," especially chapter 3.

<sup>78</sup> Smith, *Material Goods, Moving Hands*, 16.

metalware, so consumers had to trust that they were not being sold substandard metalware. Moreover, the metalware trade was uniquely affected by the proliferation of new products and the interaction between old and new luxuries, which impacted upon marketing strategies and definitions of quality. There was a shift of importance from intrinsic quality to novelty, aesthetic value and standardisation, a view supported by Bettoni in her study of the Italian button and buckle trade.<sup>79</sup> This was more significant in the English metalware trades. The expansion of the trade, and shift of importance from intrinsic quality to novelty and fashionability, sparked new debates about quality, in which producers used marketing and advertising to increase their influence, and persuade the public that their skills and innovations were desirable.

## **6.7 Innovation**

It was especially important for producer-retailers to provide details about production when advertising and marketing new products, materials and innovations in production and technologies. This ensured that potential consumers possessed the necessary knowledge, and were reassured of an object's quality, fashionability and tastefulness.<sup>80</sup> As with the emphasis upon product variety and production, this appealed to the consumer interest in production, demand for novelty and shifting understanding of quality. Therefore, by emphasising innovation in the marketing of metalware, which was seen in 11 percent of the sample of trade cards (Tables 6.1 and 6.2), producers and retailers developed the perception of production and its association with variety and quality. The proportion of trade cards was more significant when it is

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<sup>79</sup> Bettoni, "Usefulness, Ornamental Function and Novelty," 171-207.

<sup>80</sup> Berg and Clifford, "Selling Consumption," 166.



taken into account that explicit references to innovation worked hand in hand with discussions of product variety and production.

Throughout the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, innovations were most frequently advertised within the knife and razor trades and Sheffield plate production, which both saw significant developments to improve their quality and make them more efficient and durable. On his trade card, the cutler John Waller claimed that ‘tis also proved, that my razors shave lighter and closer to any others’.<sup>81</sup> He described how this was because ‘all edge tools are saws from the pores of mettall, so of consequence the closer the pores the better the colour & finer the edge’. Another partnership of cutlers, Riccard and Littlefear, similarly claimed to have made ‘many new and useful improvements’, including ‘razors of a new construction’.<sup>82</sup> Because razors were practical items, this emphasis upon innovation was also a statement about its use value, as customers were likely interested in how sharp the blade was.<sup>83</sup> Producers took this into account when designing and marketing their products. Boulton and Fothergill emphasised the sharpness and innovation of their blades by explicitly stating on their designs within their pattern book that their knife blades were ‘edged with silver’ (Figure 6.8). This aspect of their design strengthened the product, which would likely have been plated silver, and made it more durable. Their pattern

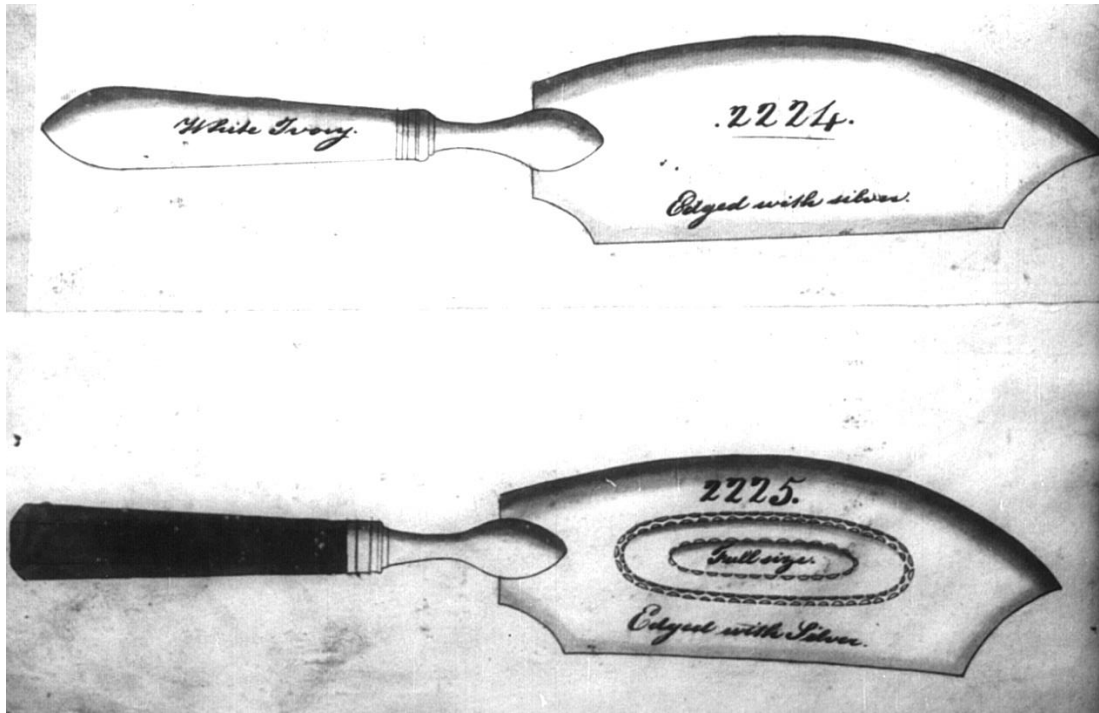
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<sup>81</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/WALLER, Trade Card of John Waller, c. 1750.

<sup>82</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/RICCARD, Trade Card of Riccard & Littlefear, 1783.

<sup>83</sup> Alun Withey, *Technology, Self-Fashioning and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

book would have been circulated to prospective consumers and so also acted as a form of advertising.<sup>84</sup>



**Figure 6.8: Pattern Book 2, Boulton and Fothergill, Late-Eighteenth Century, Birmingham City Archives, Microfilm A 621.1.**

Sheffield plate was similarly advertised as being ‘improved’, for example in Edward Lamb’s trade card.<sup>85</sup> The materiality of Sheffield plate, a sheet of copper plated with silver which was an innovation and new material of the eighteenth century, meant that as it aged and was used, the silver wore away to expose the bright orange colour of the copper beneath. A poor-quality piece of Sheffield plate would have resulted in this colour becoming exposed more quickly and easily. Unlike with ormolu, Sheffield plate was a success and became widely accepted and desired by the public, who understood that it was necessary to look for the strength of the plate when purchasing it. Other types of silver plate were also advertised as being ‘strong’ and the

<sup>84</sup> For more about the role of pattern books, see chapter 4 of this thesis.

<sup>85</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/LAMB, Trade Card of Edward Lamb, 1800.

‘best plated goods’.<sup>86</sup> This suggests that it was those items that were known to have a potential problem with their use or durability that were advertised to be of an improved design and a higher quality. The best quality plated goods were edged with silver to strengthen them, as seen by Boulton and Fothergill’s design for knives (Figure 6.8). One object, a Sheffield plate sauce boat made in 1780 (Figure 6.9), was even marked ‘Silver Edg’d’ on its base to advertise this aspect of its production on the object itself. It was important to explicitly communicate this to the consumer because it was difficult to see just by viewing the object.



**Figure 6.9: Sauce Boat, Sheffield Plate, 1780, Victoria and Albert Museum, M.314-1912.**

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<sup>86</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/LONDON, Trade Card of the London Silver Plate Manufactory, 1788.

It is likely because of this importance on durability and use-value, that innovation was advertised more frequently for hardware goods than luxury goods.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, across the metalware trade, the advertising of innovation was an important part of the communication between producer and consumer, and the circulation of information about production.

Another sign of quality for new products and materials was a patent, which indicated that the producer had created a new design or innovation in production or technology, and applied for a patent.<sup>88</sup> Patents remained expensive and exclusive, costing around £100 as well as the cost of court proceedings, so smaller workshops might instead have chosen to protect their inventions through secrecy.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, patents and other innovations were regularly advertised in newspapers and on trade cards. Because patents only had a limited legal weight in practice, and were difficult to enforce, their biggest value came from their persuasive potential. J. Dyson, a brazier, ironmonger & tin manufacturer, published in the *Kentish Gazette* that he ‘RESPECTFULLY informs his friends and the public in general... that he continues his manufacture... on the most approved principles, and for the following articles the King’s patent has been decreed...’.<sup>90</sup> It was important for all advertisements to

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<sup>87</sup> Innovation in production and technology was discussed in 16% of hardware trade cards but only 6% of luxury trade cards in the sample of trade cards (Table 6.2).

<sup>88</sup> Sean Bottomley, *The British Patent System During the Industrial Revolution 1700-1852: From Privilege to Property* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); and Christine MacLeod, *Inventing the Industrial Revolution: The English Patent System, 1660-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>89</sup> Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, “Technical Invention and Institutional Credit in France and Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century,” *History and Technology* 16/3 (2000), 289.

<sup>90</sup> *Kentish Gazette*, 19 June 1787.

maintain this tone of respectability, so that they appealed to the polite consumer discussed earlier in this chapter.<sup>91</sup>

Provincial newspaper advertisements show that a wider network of producers and retailers benefited from patents and referred to them in their advertising and marketing. Regional retailers could obtain exclusive rights to sell particular innovations or patented metalware. One advertisement, published in 1764, explained that,

Joseph Spackman... London Pewterer, having invented a method, entirely new, of turning OVALS in Pewter, English china, and all other earthen ware, has obtained letters patent as above, for the sole making and vending the same, for the term of fourteen years... in consequence of which, he has made a large quantity of these OVAL-PEWTER DISHES of the 'superfine' hard metal, far superior both in beauty and strength to anything ever performed in the oval way, and has solely appointed / ELIZABETH REED and SON / TIN-PLATE WORKERS, BRAZIERS, COPPER-SMITHS, and PEWTERERS... TO SELL the SAME in Newcastle...<sup>92</sup>

Innovation did not just benefit the patent holder, but a wider variety of producers who capitalised on the reputation of patents, new designs and production methods. This

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<sup>91</sup> Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*; Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, 13; see also, Maxine Berg, "Product Innovation in Core Consumer Industries in Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *Technological Revolutions in Europe*, ed. Maxine Berg and Kristine Bruland (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1998), 138-157.

<sup>92</sup> *Newcastle Courant*, 29 June 1765.

could further be used to convey messages about quality, with the emphasis upon ‘superior’ methods and ‘approved principles’.

## 6.8 Fashion

The expanding variety of products and materials, and the increasing importance of novelty and fashionability, also influenced the wider marketing of metalware, because producers and retailers placed an increasing emphasis on taste and fashionability.<sup>93</sup> Trade cards and newspaper advertisements exclaimed that their products were in the ‘newest fashions’, or in the ‘most pleasing & elegant style’.<sup>94</sup> Other goods were described as ‘fancy’, ‘rich’, ‘fine’ or ‘in the most pleasing taste’. Sometimes these phrases were used generally to refer to the full range of products for sale, but others referred to specific items, for example the trade card of John Walker highlighted his ‘newest fashion’d French plate’.<sup>95</sup> Silver buckles and buttons were also regularly described as fashionable, as seen in an advertisement for Manly’s Golden Eagle shop, which claimed that ‘there is no article where fancy directs the choice so much as in that of buckles and buttons’.<sup>96</sup> Manly emphasised quality through reference to variety and taste, promised ‘the greatest variety of the newest and most elegant patterns ever exposed to sale in this kingdom’, and even guaranteed that ‘any pattern which does

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<sup>93</sup> Fashion was emphasised visually and linguistically in 18% of the sample of trade cards.

<sup>94</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/SHRUDER, Trade Card of James Shruder, 1750; and London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/DAVIES, Trade Card of Davies & Janaway, 1750.

<sup>95</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/WALKER, Trade Card of John Walker, 1730.

<sup>96</sup> *Hibernian Journal; Or, Choice of Liberty*, 24 January 1776.

not happen to please, may be exchanged in three days for any other, or any article of equal value’.

Descriptive terms were further used to combine the idea of fashion and taste with innovation and workmanship, such as when metalware was described as ‘curious’ and ‘neat’. In particular, small decorative items and novelties such as a range of toys appealed to the curious consumer, as seen in the newspaper advertisement of G. Willdey, whose ‘Goldsmith’s, Toy and Spectacle Shop, at the Corner of Ludgate-street by St Paul’s... hath a large choice of curious things in Gold, Silver, Jewels and Jewellers Work; fine China and Cutlers Ware; and many curious things’.<sup>97</sup> Workmanship was also described as ‘curious’, as in the advertisement of Thomas Gill, which emphasised that he produced ‘all sorts of small files in the most curious method’.<sup>98</sup> The marketing of new luxuries emphasised the connection between luxury, novelty and exoticism.<sup>99</sup>

Fashion was also conveyed visually in the marketing and advertising of metalware. Trade cards, in particular, were highly visual, and used a range of decorative and symbolic images. Decorative frames and flourishes conveyed messages about design and fashion, which the knowledgeable consumer would have been able to interpret. It communicated to consumers that the retailer was aware of the current fashions, and that they placed a high priority upon aesthetic quality and taste in their work. Trade cards themselves reflected contemporary fashions that changed over time,

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<sup>97</sup> *Daily Post*, Issue 5514 (14 May 1737).

<sup>98</sup> *Aris’s Birmingham Gazette*, Issue 368 (28 November 1748).

<sup>99</sup> Natacha Coquery, “The Semi-Luxury Market, Shoppers and Social Diffusion: Marketing Chinoiserie in Eighteenth Century Paris”, in *Fashioning Old and New: Changing Consumer Patterns in Western Europe, 1650-1900*, ed. Bruno Blondé, Natacha Coquery, Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 124.

for example they could be neo-classical or Rococo in their aesthetic.<sup>100</sup> This made the trade card more decorative and attractive to a potential consumer. The visual messages of bill-heads and trade cards emphasised the status of the shop, the producers and their products. Victoria Morgan suggests that the trade card itself was seen as a fashionable, innovative and exclusive method of advertising that conveyed the status of the shop.<sup>101</sup>

As seen by the trade cards of the jeweller and goldsmith William Smith and the goldsmith and watch-maker Thomas Gardner (Figure 6.10 and 6.11), the decorative frames were intertwined with the depiction of fashionable products, where the Rococo design of the frame merged into the design of the objects.



**Figure 6.10: (Left) Trade Card of William Smith, c. 1765, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/SMITH; Figure 6.11: (Right) Trade Card of Thomas Gardner, c. 1780, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/GARDNER.**

<sup>100</sup> Celina Fox, “Art and Trade - From the Society of Arts to the Royal Academy of Arts,” in *London 1753*, ed. Sheila O’Connell (London: The British Museum Press, 2003), 18-27; and Michael Snodin, *Rococo: Art & Design in Hogarth’s England* (London: V&A Museum, 1984).

<sup>101</sup> Morgan, “Beyond the Boundary of the Shop,” 65.



As demonstrated by a comparison of the two trade cards (Figures 6.10 and 6.11), many trade cards were created from stock patterns and designs.<sup>102</sup> Whilst there are some notable differences between the two trade cards, such as the different shop signs, and some of the objects that appear on the border of the frame, they are almost identical. Therefore, it is not always clear to what extent the producer or retailer was responsible for the design, because the printer played an important but often invisible role. Sometimes the signature of the engraver can be found hidden amongst the design, but their influence remains difficult to determine. Nevertheless, the producer or retailer would have still made their choice about the design and how they wanted to advertise their products. This ability for the retailer to choose how their goods were marketed is reflected by the way in which more trade cards associated with luxury metalware were highly visual and used images (84 percent) than those that were associated with the hardware trades (64 percent).<sup>103</sup> However, both luxury goods and practical hardware items could be advertised visually with an emphasis upon fashion and taste.<sup>104</sup>

Not only was fashion conveyed visually and linguistically through advertisements, but through the wider marketing strategies of producers and retailers and their design of retail spaces.<sup>105</sup> Product variety and fashion came hand in hand,

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<sup>102</sup> Berg and Clifford, "Selling Consumption," 149-151.

<sup>103</sup> As with Table 6.2, I have divided luxury and hardware trades by the contemporary division discussed in chapter 3. Luxury goods include goldsmiths, silversmiths, watch makers and jewellers; hardware includes ironmongers, braziers, tin-makers, plate manufacturers and cutlers.

<sup>104</sup> Berg and Clifford, "Selling Consumption," 149.

<sup>105</sup> For more about the design of shop spaces and the retailing of metalware see chapter 7. See also, Andrew Hann and Jon Stobart, "Sites of Consumption: The Display of Goods in Provincial Shops in Eighteenth-Century England," *Cultural and Social History* 2/2 (2005), 165-187; and Claire Walsh, "Shop Design and the Display of Goods in Eighteenth-Century London," *Journal of Design History* 8/3 (1995): 157-176.

and was made increasingly possible in the eighteenth century with the introduction of new goods and materials. In part, this was because of the expanding retail spaces which were able to source more goods from regional towns and abroad. Moreover, the flexible organisation of production meant that producers could quickly adapt their product range, follow fashions, and satisfy consumer demand for new patterns and designs. Whilst these changes in production and advertising were influenced by the new regional manufacturing towns of Birmingham and Sheffield, and their development of new products and materials, the importance of fashion spread across the whole metalware trade.

## **Conclusion**

A closer look at the advertising and marketing of metalware gives an insight into how metalware was perceived and how quality was defined. Claims of quality were made explicitly, with reference to the ‘best’, ‘strongest’ or most ‘extraordinary’ goods, but quality could also be implicitly conveyed through visual and linguistic conventions relating to production, innovation and fashion. Moreover, in print and beyond, personal relationships were crucial in reassuring existing and potential customers, as well as the wider public, about the quality of producers, retailers and their products. Not only was quality important within traditional luxury trades, where intrinsic value was a major concern, but also for the full range of metalware including new products and materials, hardware and second-hand goods. Quality was not always tangible or inherent, and so reputation was crucial in the perception, construction and definition of quality.

Quality was increasingly intertwined with product variety, novelty and fashion. An expanding variety of metalware was made available to consumers because of a range of new retail spaces and warehouses, who could source products from across the country and across the world. More influential were changes in the organisation of production and innovation in technologies that allowed producers to provide consumers with greater choice. Particularly with new products and materials, such as Sheffield plate, it was important for the public to understand their quality and their value. Advertising helped to communicate the necessary information to consumers so that they understood details about their production that made new products and materials desirable. Producers therefore used the advertising and marketing of metalware to influence the perception of production, and associate production with quality and variety. Production was on display to the public in new and exciting ways, and images and descriptions of production reoccurred in newspaper advertisements and on trade cards.<sup>106</sup> This gave the consumer new ways of experiencing and purchasing metalware, and new knowledge to understand quality.

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<sup>106</sup> This discussion of the consumer perception of production will be expanded in chapter 8 to show that consumers were also able to see production first-hand and were encouraged to tour manufactories.

## Chapter 7.

### Emphasising Quality and Novelty in the Retailing and Distribution of Metalware

The increasing emphasis upon product variety, novelty and fashionability in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries led to new opportunities to buy consumer goods. With the expansion of the trade, there were inevitably more people involved in the production and distribution process. Alongside an expanding range of shops, there was a wider network of retailers, agents and middle-men. Consequently, consumers could acquire metalware in new ways. Metalware could be bought wholesale or retail, bespoke, ready-made or second-hand, exchanged in pawnbrokers, won in lotteries, or acquired in auction houses. As this chapter shows, many of these new means of retailing goods were flexible systems of retailing, that could be easily adapted to respond to new fashions and consumer demand. This builds upon recent literature that has begun to create a more nuanced view of how consumer goods were bought and sold.<sup>1</sup> In particular, recent attention has been given to retailing in provincial towns;

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Cox, *The Complete Tradesman: A Study of Retailing, 1550-1820* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); Andrew Hann and Jon Stobart, "Sites of Consumption: The Display of Goods in Provincial Shops in Eighteenth-Century England," *Cultural and Social History* 2/2 (2005): 165-187; Bruno Blondé, Natacha Coquery, Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme, eds. *Fashioning Old and New: Changing Consumer Patterns in Western Europe, 1650-1900* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009); and Claire Walsh, "Shopping in Early Modern London c.1660-1800," Unpublished PhD Thesis, European University Institute, Florence, 2001.

however, this often focuses upon formal methods of retailing, such as shop spaces.<sup>2</sup> This chapter will add to such research by expanding attention into the full variety of retailing methods.

By looking at the retailing and distribution of metalware in more depth, it is possible to get a greater insight into how metalware was perceived and quality was deliberated. These expanding retail networks led to a range of new spaces in which the wider public could purchase and inspect objects, including warehouses and showrooms. Shopping was increasingly seen as a sociable activity, and it was not only those who intended to purchase goods who toured shops, warerooms and auction houses.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, consumers and the wider public played an important role in the inspection of goods and assessment of quality and value.<sup>4</sup> They were aided in the inspection of goods by producers and the guilds, who communicated to consumers through newspaper advertisements, trade cards, and publications.<sup>5</sup> Consumers also turned to retailers for information about the quality and fashionability of objects. Retailers were able to influence what was desirable, valuable and fashionable, and how the quality of metalware was defined and perceived. Literature has centred around the retailer's role as a 'middle-man' or a broker of quality and taste,<sup>6</sup> with some

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<sup>2</sup> Jon Stobart, "The Shopping Streets of Provincial England, 1650-1840," in *The Landscape of Consumption: Shopping Streets and Cultures in Western Europe, 1600-1900*, ed. Jan Hein Furnée and Clé Lesger (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 17-18.

<sup>3</sup> Helen Berry, "Polite Consumption: Shopping in Eighteenth-Century England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002), 375.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 387.

<sup>5</sup> As shown in chapters 2, 5 and 8 of this thesis.

<sup>6</sup> Dries Lyna and Ilja Van Damme, "A Strategy of Seduction? The Role of Commercial Advertisements in the Eighteenth-Century," *Business History* 51/1 (2009): 100-121; Ilja Van Damme, "From a 'Knowledgeable' Salesman towards a 'Recognizable' Product? Questioning Branding Strategies before Industrialization (Antwerp, Seventeenth to

historians suggesting that they provided a greater degree of quality control.<sup>7</sup> However, as this chapter shows, there were producers who retailed their own goods, without a reliance upon middle-men. These producer-retailers had a unique role to play in the retailing of metalware and the deliberation of quality. Producer-retailers across the metalware trades sought to differentiate themselves from other retailers and middle-men by arguing that they could provide customers with more variety and higher quality metalware: they claimed that they had more control over quality by managing the production process, and marking or branding their goods which acted as a guarantee of quality.

Therefore, this chapter shows that there were new ways of valuing, inspecting, and acquiring quality metalware, in which producers who retailed their own goods (producer-retailers) emphasised their ability to produce quality metalware in an increasing variety of materials and designs. It will do this by considering how metalware was distributed and retailed in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The first part of the chapter explores the variety of ways that metalware could be purchased. It analyses how metalware was displayed and made accessible to the public, and shows that different marketing strategies meant that, at times, metalware was displayed prominently in shop windows, but could otherwise be hidden from view in drawers and wrappers. Each method worked to enhance the

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Nineteenth Centuries),” in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture, 1500-1900*, ed. Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 84; and Hann and Stobart, “Sites of Consumption,” 179.

<sup>7</sup> Ilja Van Damme, “Changing Consumer Preferences and Evolutions in Retailing. Buying and Selling Consumer Durables in Antwerp 1648-1748,” in *Buyers and Sellers: Retail Circuits and Practices in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Bruno Blondé, et al. (Turnhout: Brepols: 2006), 202; and Walsh, “Shopping in Early Modern London,” 93.

fashionability and quality of the objects. There was a perceived hierarchy of the different methods of retailing, and debates about where was the best, and most trustworthy, place to buy goods of the best quality or highest taste. The second half of the chapter considers the debates surrounding retailing, and how the perceived hierarchy of the different forms of retailing was constructed and challenged, as the ability to guarantee quality was debated. Producer-retailers established their role as the guarantors of quality and variety.

## **7.1 Displaying Metalware**

The way in which consumers encountered metal goods was a crucial factor in determining the target audience, value and quality of particular products and materials. Retailers developed their shop design in order to market their goods as tasteful and fashionable. As argued by Walsh, the retail space itself was a crucial aspect of advertising.<sup>8</sup> In the first instance, this often involved the display of objects in shop windows. Metalware, in particular, had the ability to stand out. Not only was there a vibrant range of designs and materials, but the material nature of metalware gave it the ability to catch the light and the consumer eye. A poem published in the *Daily Gazetteer*, described how in London, ‘In Fleetstreet we see, as we saunter along/ Two

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<sup>8</sup> Claire Walsh, “The Advertising and Marketing of Consumer Goods in Eighteenth Century London,” in *Advertising and the European City: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Clemens Wischermann and Elliott Shore (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 79-95.

Glittering Toy-shops that dazzle the Throng’.<sup>9</sup> Maxine Berg emphasises how these glittering shops became ‘tourist attractions for Europe’s elites’.<sup>10</sup>

The display of goods in shop windows served a wider marketing purpose, in reality but also in print, where many trade cards displayed representations of the shop front (for example, Figures 7.1 and 7.2).<sup>11</sup> Morgan shows how the image of the shop spread into trade cards, bill-heads, town guides and trade directories.<sup>12</sup> As seen by the trade card of Scudamore, a cutler in Birmingham (Figure 7.1), the representation of the shop includes extensive and imposing shop windows, where a wide variety of metal goods are on display. The objects on display in the shop window are highly detailed and decorative, and appear to reflect the precise range of goods that were for sale. This variety is further emphasised by the shop signs, which specify that, as well as being a cutler, Scudamore’s shop served as an ironmongery, nail warehouse, locksmith, gold and silversmith and surgical instrument maker. By including an image of the shop front, a trade card or bill-head could therefore emphasise the location of the shop and the range of products that were for sale.

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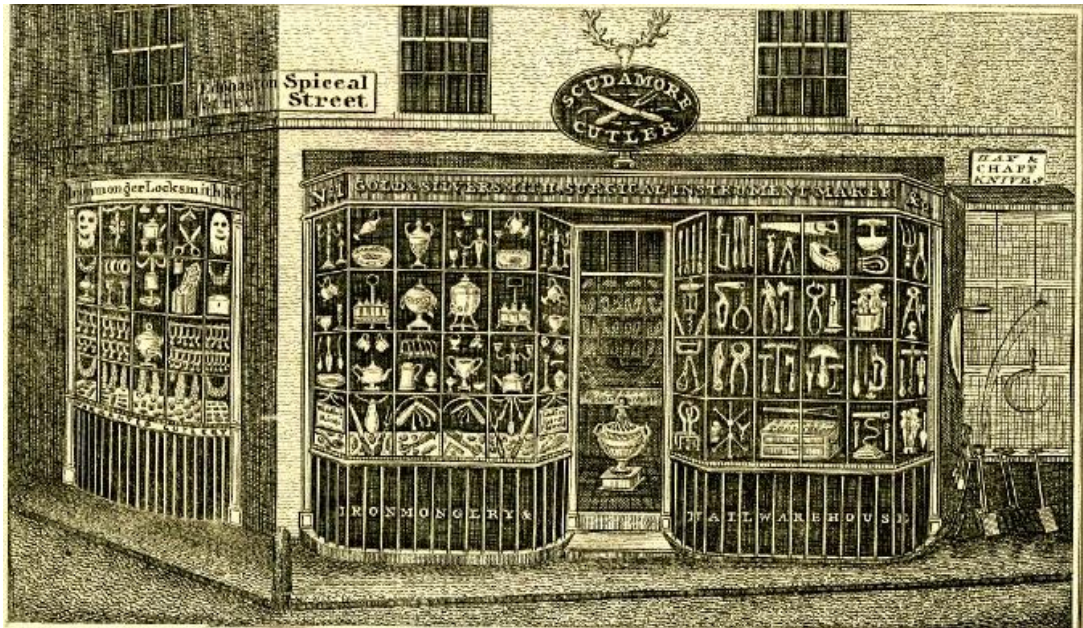
<sup>9</sup> *Daily Gazetteer*, Issue 757 (28 November 1737).

<sup>10</sup> Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 157.

<sup>11</sup> As discussed in chapter 6 of this thesis, it is uncertain to what extent the images on trade cards are an accurate representation of what they are depicting. They often used reoccurring stock images that were designed by an engraver or printer.

<sup>12</sup> Victoria Morgan, “Beyond the Boundary of the Shop: Retail Advertising Spaces in Eighteenth-Century Provincial England,” in *Cultures of Selling: Perspectives on Consumption and Society since 1700*, ed. John Benson and Laura Ugolini (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 59-79.





**Figure 7.1: Trade Card of Scudamore, Cutler of Birmingham, c. 1790-1818, British Museum, Heal,52.94.**

Shop fronts could also play an advertising function on bill-heads, for example in the bill-head of Folkard, a working jeweller, silversmith and watch-maker (Figure 7.2). Not only did this image of the shop front serve as a reminder of the location of the shop to the customer, and thus to settle the bill, but it encouraged return custom as it emphasised the variety of products that were for sale in the shop window. In both cases, the display of goods also conveyed messages to the consumer about the fashionability and desirability of their products, and thus helped to develop the reputation of the retailer.<sup>13</sup> They also suggest that a range of different types of metalware, including luxury, populuxe and hardware goods, were displayed in shop windows.

<sup>13</sup> Hann and Stobart, "Sites of Consumption," 167.



**Figure 7.2: Bill-Head of Folkard, c. 1800, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/FOLKARD.**

Even though the display of goods was a key marketing strategy, there were nevertheless conflicting ideas in the eighteenth century about how to retail metalware and how best to utilise shop spaces and display metal goods. There were a number of different factors that influenced shop design, not least the capital that retailers had available to spend on expensive retail spaces, shop windows or furnishings. Shop windows, especially those made of glass, were expensive. Only the wealthiest retailers and manufacturers could afford such retail premises, just as it was the wealthiest retailers who could afford to print their own trade cards, which suggests that the images of shop fronts on trade cards did not represent the majority of retail spaces. As shown by Andrew Hann and Jon Stobart, only 12.5 percent of inventories that contain information about shop fittings, from a sample of 119, refer explicitly to windows.<sup>14</sup> There were also a wide range of other types of retail space, including semi-permanent stall and structures, and wooden bulk shops with no windows or open shutters, that benefited from the display of goods, and where transactions could take place through

<sup>14</sup> Hann and Stobart, "Sites of Consumption," 171. It is possible that the actual figure is higher than this because inventories focus upon moveable goods and so may not have included shop windows as fixtures.

an opening in the window space.<sup>15</sup> These were more likely when retailing goods of a lower value, such as pewter.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, a wide range of retailers, who sold a variety of metalware of different values, were able to use the display of goods to emphasise the variety, fashionability and quality of their metalware.

There was also a debate about how goods could be retailed to emphasise their novelty and fashionability. Some retailers chose to display metalware in shop windows, but others hid their goods from view to enhance customers' curiosity. Matthew Boulton highlighted this conflict when describing his design for a London showroom. He explained that his 'ideas of a shop or saleroom are very different' to some other manufacturers, 'for I would rather choose a large elegant room up stairs without any other window than a sky light by this sort of concealment you excite curiosity more'.<sup>17</sup> Claire Walsh explains that upstairs shops created a sense of intimacy.<sup>18</sup> In particular, this intimacy suited the polite middling-class and the social elite.<sup>19</sup> As Boulton reasoned, he 'would not have it a shew to ye street, as the nobility

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<sup>15</sup> Claire Walsh, "Stalls, Bulks, Shops and Long-Term Change in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth Century England," in *The Landscape of Consumption: Shopping Streets and Cultures in Western Europe, 1600-1900*, ed. Jan Hein Furnée and Clé Lesger (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 38.

<sup>16</sup> Claire Walsh, "Shop Design and the Display of Goods in Eighteenth-Century London," *Journal of Design History* 8/3 (1995), 169.

<sup>17</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/2/23, Letter Book 1768-73, 'Letter Matthew Boulton to James Adam', 1 October 1770, f. 29.

<sup>18</sup> Walsh, "Stalls, Bulks, Shops and Long-Term Change," 41.

<sup>19</sup> Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (London: Yale University Press, 1998), 13; and John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, [1997] 2013), 598.

are more at their care in a private shop'.<sup>20</sup> Boulton suggests that this was especially necessary within the metalware trade, that 'the great customers of plate are such as are not to be caught by shew as they walk along the street' and that 'unprivate shops are only customers in London for at Paris the finest shops are upstairs at a large room'.<sup>21</sup> The private upstairs shop had become fashionable in itself, and worked to create intimacy and the best environment for selling metalware.

Not only did the upstairs shop serve to enhance the consumer experience and curiosity in the goods, but it also protected new fashions and designs from 'street walkers pirates'.<sup>22</sup> If goods were 'exposed to the street walker' there was the danger that 'their value & their novelty is diminished in ye opinion of fine folks'.<sup>23</sup> By having products and designs hidden from view, it was possible to ensure that innovations and 'the novelty of patterns are preserved better from Birmgm, Sheffield & London pimps'.<sup>24</sup> The choice between these retail premises and shop designs was also affected by taxes on shop signs and windows, and attempts by the state to profit from the expansion of the trade. For example, a tax on shop signs and all open shops and retailers was proposed in 1757 and introduced in 1785, which required all merchants, wholesale and retail dealers to be licenced at between 10s and £2 a year.<sup>25</sup> Shops above

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<sup>20</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/19, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1770, 'Mr Boulton. My Ideas of a Theka in London', 1770.

<sup>21</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/2/23, Letter Book 1768-73, 'Letter Matthew Boulton to James Adam', 1 October 1770, f. 29.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/19, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1770, 'Mr Boulton. My Ideas of a Theka in London', 1770.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Cox, *The Complete Tradesman*, 34.

the stairs were excluded from this tax, which may have encouraged retailers to pursue this alternative means of retailing their goods.

Although the debates surrounding the display of consumer goods spread across different trades, they were especially important when discussing the retailing of metalware because of the considerable variety of products and materials within the metalware trade, and their differences in value. There may have been differing opinions about whether to have goods on display or hidden from view, but all retailers, whether they sold pewter cheaply from a bulk shop, or expensive luxury goods in a shop window, sought out marketing and retail strategies to emphasise the novelty, fashionability and quality of their goods.

## **7.2 The Shop**

The shop interior was also carefully designed in order to display metal goods to their advantage. With the right design, it was possible for the shop to act as a form of branding, which helped to establish the retailer's reputation as a trustworthy person selling goods of a high quality.<sup>26</sup> This occurred in the variety of different retail spaces, whether the target audience was wealthy consumers wanting luxury items, poorer individuals looking for second-hand goods, or the expanding middling-class seeking new luxuries and populuxe goods. Similar tactics could be used, but as Walsh explains, they could be enacted in different ways and at varying costs.<sup>27</sup> There might also be

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<sup>26</sup> Natacha Coquery, "The Language of Success: Marketing and Distributing Semi-Luxury Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris," *Journal of Design History* 17/1 (2004), 78.

<sup>27</sup> Walsh, "Shop Design and the Display of Goods," 169.



regional variation depending on proximity to larger metropolitan towns or areas where retailers had dual-occupations.<sup>28</sup>

Again, it is possible to get a sense of the shop interior from images on trade cards. The trade card of Robert Peircey, a London pewterer, displays his shop interior in a decorative frame (Figure 7.3).



**Figure 7.3: Trade Card of Robert Peircey, c. 1758, British Museum, Heal,95.27.**

The design of the shop interior reflects the message on the trade card, that he ‘makes & sells all sorts of Pewter toys’. The shelving across the wall behind the counter

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<sup>28</sup> Hann and Stobart, “Sites of Consumption,” 172.

displays a range of parcels of metalware, which could be used to reflect ‘the organization and good management of the shopkeeper’.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the shop assistant is pictured displaying a range of toys and small metal goods on the counter, which the prospective consumers appear to be handling and inspecting. This act of unwrapping toys and small metal goods in wrappers or papers was an effective way for shops to display their goods at a low cost.<sup>30</sup> It was also theatrical and contributed to the experience and excitement of shopping. It was often new luxuries, products and materials that were wrapped and displayed in this manner, for example a set of gilt-metal chatelaines - belt-clasps - made by Boulton and Fothergill in the late-eighteenth century, which have remained sewn to their wrappings (Figure 7.4). These chatelaines were highly decorative, and had the dazzling appearance from the gilding, which would have been enhanced when they were unwrapped from their packaging.



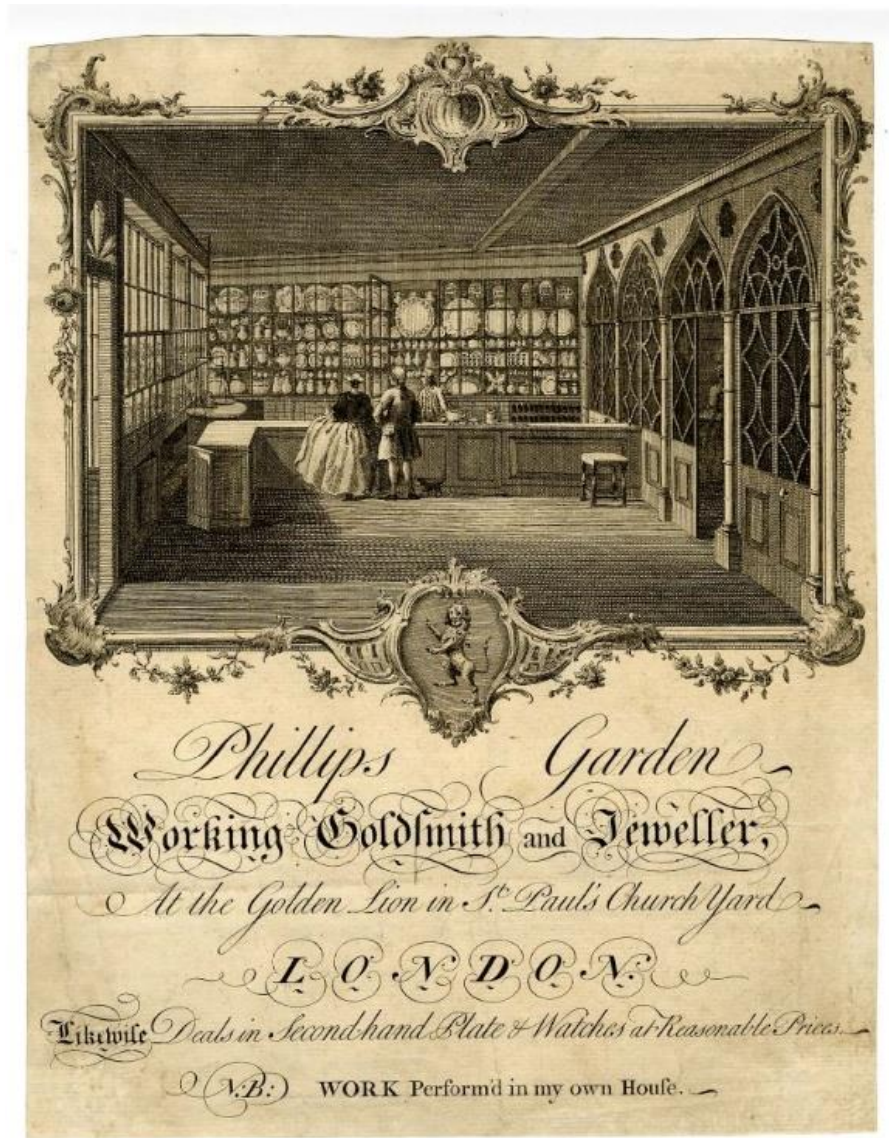
**Figure 7.4: Chatelaines, Gilt-Metal, Boulton and Fothergill, c. 1765, Soho House Museum.**

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<sup>29</sup> Walsh, “Shop Design and the Display of Goods,” 164.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

In contrast, the trade card of Phillips Garden, a working goldsmith and jeweller (Figure 7.5) shows a shop interior in which the goods themselves were already on display. Garden's trade card shows a highly decorative shop interior with numerous arches, and metal goods and large plates on display in expansive cabinets.



**Figure 7.5: Trade Card of Phillips Garden, c. 1750, British Museum, Heal,67.156.**

Inventories give a more accurate and detailed picture of the shop interior. Inventories were taken at the end of life, and so do not necessarily give a sense of the fluctuation of a shop's size. Nevertheless, they do provide information about the range of stock



that shops stored and how goods were displayed. The inventory of Martha Braithwaite gives an insight into a goldsmith's shop in 1746.<sup>31</sup> This inventory shows that the shop sold a wide range of goods, from waiters and sauce boats, to spoons, buckles and buttons, which were listed by number and by weight. The inventory also lists the shop decoration, work surfaces and storage areas, which gives a detailed impression of how the shop was designed.<sup>32</sup> The focus of the shop space appears to be two large presses for plate valued at £8 9s 9d, which were glass fronted cupboards that often covered the whole wall, perhaps like that seen in the trade card of Phillips Garden (Figure 7.5).<sup>33</sup> The shop space was also decorated with 'three shew glasses with mahogany frames', '2 wooden cand pillars with an arch & 2 half arches', sash frames and 'shew boards'. There was clearly much care and expense taken to display the goods effectively, and create a sense of luxury, excitement and quality in the shop interior. Braithwaite's inventory shows that great expense was taken to make the goods secure, including money spent on '5 wainscott shutters to each of the said presses.... with iron bars and padlocks at 1s 6d a yard'.<sup>34</sup> Particularly within the metalware trades, where goods were small and easily stolen, security was an integral part of the shop design. The most valuable goods, such as gold and silver, would have been more securely stored, which is likely why they were regularly displayed inside the shop, in contrast

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<sup>31</sup> The National Archives, C105/5, Chancery Masters' Exhibits, *Braithwaite v Taylor*, 'Accounts of Administrator of Martha Braithwaite and Inventories', 1746. The Chancery Masters' Exhibits are comprised of evidence compiled for cases that were brought before the Court of Chancery.

<sup>32</sup> Claire Walsh has created a visual plan of Braithwaite's shop based upon this inventory, in Walsh, "Shop Design and the Display of Goods," 160.

<sup>33</sup> Walsh, "Shop Design and the Display of Goods," 162.

<sup>34</sup> The National Archives, C105/5, Chancery Masters' Exhibits, *Braithwaite v Taylor*, 'Accounts of Administrator of Martha Braithwaite and Inventories', 1746.

to less valuable goods such as pewter which could be displayed in the open windows of stalls and bulk shops.

Braithwaite's inventory also describes 'two draws... lind wth velvett'. The presence of expensive velvet suggests that these drawers would have been seen by the customers. Just as the trade card of Robert Peirce shows toys being unwrapped in front of the customers (Figure 7.3), drawers could also be used to display small metal goods when brought out to the public. This was common practice, and there were different methods that were all used to enhance the excitement of shopping and curiosity in the goods. Boulton also considered this in the design for his London showroom, and described that:

The drawers or the glasses & all the repositories of our goods should be under curtains so that when a stranger comes you may probably find him a pimp before he gives his point & if a real gentn or fine lady bringing things out of obscurity by gentle & gentle degrees gives them time to inspect & doth not palle the eye & exhaust the curiosity of the parties.<sup>35</sup>

The shop interior and design was therefore intertwined with the consumer experience of metalware. By displaying metalware in this way, it enforced the view of toys and small consumer goods as fashionable novelties. Shops, and especially toy-shops, also became spaces for exhibitions and entertainment, which enhanced the consumer

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<sup>35</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/19, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1770, 'Mr Boulton. My Ideas of Theka in London'.

experience.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the opulence and luxury of many of the interiors, and attention to detail in their decoration, allowed consumers to view goods in a setting that constructed the perception of quality.

In many ways, these different types of interior reflected the value of the stock, and the ability of the retailer to purchase the different items of furniture to display. Hann and Stobart's study of inventories suggests that the higher the value of stock, the more counters and shelves, rails and windows.<sup>37</sup> However, presses and cupboards were present in a range of inventories. Therefore, in their own way, all retailers emphasised the fashionability and quality of their products.

### **7.3 Retail Networks**

An increasing range of people were involved in the retailing of metalware in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although setting up a shop was expensive, there were a variety of other ways to be a part of the expanding retail and distribution networks. Producers, subcontractors, agents, retailers, shop assistants and servants, all worked together to more efficiently satisfy consumer demand.<sup>38</sup> Literature has focused on the formalisation of retailing in the eighteenth century, and has centred around the

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<sup>36</sup> Ariane Fennetaux, "Toying with Novelty: Toys, Consumption and Novelty in Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *Fashioning Old and New: Changing Consumer Patterns in Western Europe, 1650-1900*, ed. Bruno Blondé, Natasha Coquery, Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 19.

<sup>37</sup> Hann and Stobart, "Sites of Consumption," 173.

<sup>38</sup> As explored in chapter 2 of this thesis.

development of the shop space.<sup>39</sup> In particular, this has shown that there was a new fashion for showrooms and warehouses from the 1760s.<sup>40</sup> As this chapter demonstrates, there were also a range of informal retail methods that thrived, which sold metalware at auctions, in lotteries and through hawking and peddling. They were successful in improving the circulation of goods between cities, regional towns, and rural locations, and so allowed a wider range of consumers to access metalware. Moreover, the formal and informal systems of retailing were often flexible, which allowed them to respond to consumer demand and new fashions.

Retail spaces, including shops, could expand and contract at short notice. Newspapers frequently advertised vacancies for new partners, agents or shop assistants. For example, an advertisement was published in the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, for ‘A partner of an undeniable character and reputation, who understands the ironmongery and hardware business, or has been used to assist in a toy-shop’.<sup>41</sup> Another, an advertisement by Hughes’s Birmingham Warehouse, ‘Wanted, a man, one that has rode the country, for orders in the ironmongery or hardware trade, most agreeable’.<sup>42</sup> Just as there was a flexible organisation of production in the metalware trade, retailing could also be flexibly organised in the eighteenth century.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> With the notable exception of the history of hawking and peddling, for example by Laurence Fontaine, *History of Pedlars in Europe*, trans. Vicki Whittaker (Padstow: Polity Press, 1996).

<sup>40</sup> Berry, “Polite Consumption,” 383.

<sup>41</sup> *Lloyd’s Evening Post*, Issue 1150 (21 November 1764).

<sup>42</sup> *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, Issue 1150 (28 May 1764).

<sup>43</sup> The flexible organisation of production in the metalware trade was outlined in chapter 4.

There were also an increasing variety of ways in which producers could flexibly retail their own goods. As shown in the previous chapter, producers regularly sold goods wholesale to retailers across the country and across Europe. Many producers also sold their own goods directly to the consumer.<sup>44</sup> Producer-retailers varied in scale, from those who worked independently, to those who managed networks of subcontracted workers, small workshops of producers, or larger manufactories that employed hundreds of people. Many producer-retailers had shop spaces that were attached to their workshops, which can be seen by looking at inventories. For example, Mr Thomas Flint, a London producer-retailer, had a ‘work shopp’ alongside a shop; whilst the workshop contained ‘work boards’, a ‘hanging shelf’, iron work, and dishes, the shop contained a wider range of decorative devices, including a table, a desk, a looking glass, and a clock.<sup>45</sup> As the trade expanded in the eighteenth century the most successful manufacturers, such as Boulton, opened showrooms and multiple retail spaces in their provincial towns as well as in London.<sup>46</sup> They also used agents and middle-men to make contact with customers in London and other regions to take orders, show new pattern books and deliver goods. Whilst similar systems of production and retail existed across different trades, for example the numerous workshops and retail spaces of shoemakers, coopers and tanners, and ceramics manufactories and showrooms, the diversity of production and retail spaces was particularly prominent within the metalware trade.

The expanding retail networks prompted new debates about the division between production and retailing. Increasingly, producers acted as retailers and

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<sup>44</sup> The role of production in the marketing of metalware is discussed further in chapter 6.

<sup>45</sup> The National Archives, C104/198, Chancery Masters’ Exhibits, *Fisher v Frost*, ‘Several of the Inventories & Apprisism of Mr Flints Goods’, 1699.

<sup>46</sup> Berry, “Polite Consumption,” 383; and Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 185.

retailers became producers in the flexible system of production and retailing. Rather than being a separate stage of the object life-cycle after production, metalware was often altered or finished at the retail space. Ilja Van Damme shows that in Antwerp, the guilds attempted to keep the production and retail of metalware separate.<sup>47</sup> The guilds in England were also concerned when retailers produced or finished metalware without the necessary training or expertise. Within the silver trade, both producers and shopkeepers who were involved in production were required to register marks at Goldsmiths' Hall in London or the regional Assay Offices.<sup>48</sup> Across the different metalware trades, the guilds' courts were informed when a retailer who had not undergone apprenticeship training became involved in the production of metalware. A case brought before the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, complained that:

AB has for more than 7 years kept an open shop out of the City of London for the sale of Pewter wares and vessels and during that time has described himself to be a pewterer, tho' he never manufactured any pewter wares, but merely retailed the wares he bought of the manufacturers, till within those few months past, when knowing purchased the moulds of a manufacturer who had left off business, and having taken the son of such manufacturer (who is not a freeman of London), into his employment, he has begun to manufacture pewter

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<sup>47</sup> Van Damme, "Changing Consumer Preferences," 202.

<sup>48</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/89/17, 'List of London Silversmiths: Names who have Entered their Marks'.

wares and vessels, tho' he never served any apprenticeship to the trade,  
nor can have any skill in the manufacture of Pewter.<sup>49</sup>

The guilds were concerned about the disregard for their authority, but also with the potential lack of product quality and regulation of expertise through the apprenticeship system. Nevertheless, here was constant fluctuation in the retailing of metalware, as emphasised by the attempts of retailers to produce or adapt goods, and of producers in retailing goods in new ways.

This flexibility within retailing had many advantages to the producer, retailer and consumer. Just as the flexibility within the organisation of production allowed producers to adapt to new fashions, retailers could adapt around the fashionable seasons and the movement of people from town to country at different times of the year. Retailers and manufactures planned sales to specifically target influential members of the social elite based on when they were in different areas. Boulton wrote that he was advised 'to have the sale at any rate before Easter as the town will then be in confusion by people of Fashion preparing for their transmigration to the country'.<sup>50</sup> Although this was the case in a variety of trades, including textiles, it was more important in the metalware trade because of the proliferation of new luxuries, and the increasing importance of taste and fashionability.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Guildhall Library, MS 22198/1, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Papers Relating to Country Searches, 1660-1839'.

<sup>50</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to William Matthews', 23 February 1771.

<sup>51</sup> As shown in chapter 6, the marketing strategies of manufacturers within the metalware trades, especially in Birmingham and Sheffield, relied upon patronage from the social elite.

Three other informal means of flexibly retailing metalware also stand out, and played a prominent role in the perception of quality and fashionability: hawking and peddling, auctioning and the second-hand trade.

### **7.3.1 Hawkers and Pedlars**

There were a range of tradesmen on foot, pedlars, hawkers and chapmen in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who provided an alternative means of acquiring metal goods.<sup>52</sup> They walked the streets, both in towns and the country, offering to buy and sell a variety of metalware, as seen in an etching by Paul Sandby (Figure 7.6). The caption below the image reads ‘Do you want any spoons, any hard-mettle spoons. Have you any old brass or pewter to sell or change?’, which would have been spoken aloud, and would have been heard alongside the banging of the saucepan. Hawking and peddling was common practice throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was described during the trial of Thomas Nicholls, who was accused of the theft of a silver caster in 1740, and successfully defended himself by explaining his occupation as a travelling pedlar. He testified that: ‘I go about the Countries, and sell Silver Buttons and Hard-ware with a Licence: I bought this Thing of a Man, who seeing I had Silver-Buttons and Tea-Spoons in my Box, he offered me this Caster, and

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<sup>52</sup> Fontaine, *History of Pedlars*; Margaret Spufford, *The Great Reclathing of Rural England: Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1984); and Beverly Lemire, “Peddling Fashion: Salesmen, Pawnbrokers, Taylors, Thieves and the Second-hand Clothes Trade in England, c. 1700-1800,” *Textile History* 22/1 (1991): 67-82.



I bought it of him for 50 Shillings'.<sup>53</sup> Hawking and peddling were also an efficient way of circulating a range of metalware. Not only did they sell second-hand brass, pewter and silver, but they were especially suited to selling 'populuxe' goods that were designed for a wider range of consumer.<sup>54</sup> Their movement allowed new objects and fashions to be circulated quickly to consumers and retailers across the country, in urban and rural areas alike.



**Figure 7.6: Plate 11 from *The Twelve Cries of London*, Etching by Paul Sandby, 1760, Museum of London, 61.39/11.**

<sup>53</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, 16 January 1740, trial of Thomas Nicholls (t17400116-34).

<sup>54</sup> Cissie Fairchild, "The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods in Eighteenth Century Paris," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1994), 236.

The hawking and peddling of consumer goods was often seen as untrustworthy and unfashionable in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, there were attempts by the guilds across the different metalware trades to ban hawking, because of their suspicion that it encouraged the circulation of unregulated, substandard or fraudulent metalware.<sup>56</sup> Their influence extended beyond London as they sought to prevent hawking across the country. A newspaper advertisement published in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* in 1748 informed the region that 'On Tuesday at the meeting of the Hon. Committee at Guildhall, appointed for enquiring into the laws relating to hawkers and pedlars, they came to a resolution to prosecute all hawkers selling wares within the cities or liberties of the same, tho' they should appear to have licences'.<sup>57</sup>

Because hawking and peddling was an effective way of distributing new products to a wider market, the guild regulations were challenged. As Beverly Lemire argues, 'little of the early modern market could ever be entirely separated from the murkier quotidian traffic that was only imperfectly controlled by-laws or regulations, the whole a disorderly amalgam of commercial energy, custom and opportunism, in a continuous process of evolution'.<sup>58</sup> Boulton defended the important role that 'hawkers, pedlars and those who supply petty shops' played, suggesting that they did 'more

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<sup>55</sup> Nancy Cox and Karin Dannehl, *Perceptions of Retailing in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 49-66.

<sup>56</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>57</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, Issue 372 (26 December 1748).

<sup>58</sup> Beverly Lemire, "Plebeian Commercial Circuits and Everyday Material Exchange in England, c. 1600-1900", in *Buyers and Sellers: Retail Circuits and Practices in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Bruno Blondé, Peter Stabel, Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme (Turnhout: Brepols: 2006), 245.

towards supporting a great manufactory than all the Lords in the Nation'.<sup>59</sup> They therefore played an important role in wider retail networks. This flexible way of retailing metalware allowed a wider range of the public to purchase and exchange metal goods.

### 7.3.2 Auctions

Metalware could also be purchased in auctions, which were held to sell the stock in trade or household possessions of individuals who had become bankrupt or who had died. The goods that were sold at auction were extremely diverse, and varied depending on whether they were the tools and stock of producers and retailers associated with a particular trade, or the household possessions of an individual. Auctions were often arranged by a lawyer or broker, for example Stephen Geare and Webster and Willoughby. They were not at a consistent time and location, and so only succeeded if they were advertised sufficiently in advance, using newspaper advertisements, pamphlets and posters. The organisers of auctions therefore spent considerable money on advertisements. For example, during one month from March to April 1767, a broker named Deft spent a total of £11 5s 6d on advertisements for auctions in the *Daily Advertiser*.<sup>60</sup> Advertisements communicated details about the objects that were for sale, and informed the public that a comprehensive catalogue of goods was available

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<sup>59</sup> Letter from Matthew Boulton to R. Chippenhall, 9 August 1764, quoted in Neil McKendrick "Commercialization of Fashion," in *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England*, Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb (London: Europa, 1982), 77.

<sup>60</sup> The National Archives, C104/231, Chancery Masters' Exhibits, *Whitcombe v Webster*, 'Deft's Schedules in his own Hand Writing'.

in advance of the auction, and was on display in a local tavern, shop or coffee house. It was also possible to inspect the goods for sale in advance. An advertisement for the auction of the stock in trade of Robert Parr, arranged by Webster and Willoughby, specified that ‘the whole may be viewed the day before the sale to the time of sale; catalogues may be had of Mr. Webster, in Red-lion square; Mr. Willoughby, No.21, in Gloucester-street, near Bloomsbury square, and at the place of sale’.<sup>61</sup>

Auction advertisements, through the language they used and their description of the goods for sale, targeted a particular consumer and emphasised the fashionability and quality of the products. A catalogue had more space than a newspaper to describe the auction and give a detailed list of the goods for sale, and so could be more carefully crafted to emphasise the quality, authenticity or desirability of the products. There are three types of auction as reflected in the catalogues. Firstly, those that sold the stock in trade of a producer or retailer, and so emphasised the authenticity and use-value of the goods for sale. Messrs. Webster and Willoughby publicised ‘A Catalogue of the remaining stock in trade of Mr. Robert Parr, Pewterer, deceas’d... Consisting of most of the articles in the pewterer’s branch, together with his anvils and working tools.’<sup>62</sup> The stock in trade was often sold in lots of multiple objects, rather than individual objects. For example, in the auction of Robert Parr’s stock in trade, ‘four dozen of spoons, and a large ink stand and dish’ were sold to Gale for 11s, and ‘a large parcel of pewterer’s working tools’ were sold to Beeston for £1 1s.<sup>63</sup> These auctions that sold the stock in trade of a producer often targeted other producers and retailers within that trade. The most valuable or desirable products were often emphasised, which included

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<sup>61</sup> The National Archives, C104/231, Chancery Masters’ Exhibits, *Whitcombe v Webster*, ‘A Catalogue of the Remaining Stock in Trade of Robert Parr’.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

reference to Birmingham and Sheffield ware. An advertisement for the auction of ‘the remainder and choicest part of the stock in trade of the said Mr Walter’, which was to be held at ‘Geare’s Publick Sale-Warehouse in Threadneedle-street’, drew attention to the ‘London, Sheffield and Birmingham Wares’ that were up for sale.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, the advertisement for an auction selling ‘the entire stock in trade of Mr James Goodchild, deceas’d, Hardware-man, late of Cannon street’ explained that it consisted of ‘a large assortment of Sheffield, Birmingham and other cutlery ware and toy, chiefly fit for the foreign trade’.<sup>65</sup>

Secondly, there were catalogues for auctions that were held upon the death or bankruptcy of individuals, which highlighted the household goods that were for sale, especially any notable or valuable collections of plate or textiles. Catalogues for these auctions were, like an inventory, often divided by the room in the house, with plate often listed separately and sold by weight. A ‘catalogue of... W. Dickinson esq. deceased’, specified the sale of ‘all the genuine household furniture, china, books, VALUABLE PLATE, linen, and wearing apparel’.<sup>66</sup> Notable for its suggestion of quality amongst the list of goods was ‘a pair of neat sauce boats’, which were sold for £3 0s 6d. Another catalogue for ‘all the genuine elegant, household furniture, plate, china, linen, pictures, books, fire arms &c. of Morris Spurling, Esq; deceased’ reassured the reader that the objects for sale were ‘in excellent condition’.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Daily Advertiser*, Issue 5050 (28 March 1747).

<sup>65</sup> *Daily Advertiser*, Issue 6603 (6 March 1752).

<sup>66</sup> The National Archives, C104/231, Chancery Masters’ Exhibits, Whitcombe v Webster, ‘A Catalogue of all the Genuine Household Furniture, China, Books, VALUABLE PLATE, Linen, and Wearing Apparel, of W. Dickinson Esq. Deceased’.

<sup>67</sup> The National Archives, C104/231, Chancery Masters’ Exhibits, Whitcombe v Webster, ‘A Catalogue of all the Genuine Elegant, Household Furniture, Plate, China, Linen, Pictures, Books, Fire Arms &c. of Morris Spurling, Esq’.

Thirdly, there were auctions that were held upon the death of the nobility, social elite or celebrated artists, where the curiosity and fashionability of the objects was exaggerated. For example, in the cases of ‘a catalogue of all the genuinely rich household furniture, pictures, and other valuable EFFECTS, of the right honourable Lady PHILLIPPA CONNELL, DECEASED’, and ‘A catalogue of all the valuable stock in trade of that well known and celebrated artist, Mr Diedric Nicolaus Anderson’.<sup>68</sup> The language was especially descriptive in the catalogue for Anderson’s goods, which consisted of ‘Superb vases, bronzes, statues, and antiquities, elegantly executed and finished; also his valuable collection of patterns, modelings, and other curiosities, executed for most of the nobility. Likewise his stock of tools, engines, dyes, ornaments, capitals, mouldings, & c. and a large quantity of curious work, finished and unfinished, in brass, copper, and other metals’.<sup>69</sup> Throughout the catalogue, goods were described as ‘elegantly executed’, ‘highly finished’, and ‘curious’, emphasising the quality and fashionability of the goods that were for sale. This language was more descriptive than in other catalogues, which suggests that the auction was an object of curiosity and entertainment.

Auctions were popular social spectacles, where the public went to socialise and demonstrate their ability to value and acquire goods. They were a form of

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<sup>68</sup> The National Archives, C104/231, Whitcombe v Webster, Chancery Masters’ Exhibits, ‘A Catalogue of all the Genuinely Rich Household Furniture, Pictures, and other Valuable EFFECTS, of the Right Honourable Lady PHILLIPPA CONNELL’; and The National Archives, C104/231, Chancery Masters’ Exhibits, Whitcombe v Webster, ‘A Catalogue of all the Valuable Stock in Trade of that Well Known and Celebrated Artist, Mr Diedric Nicolaus Anderson’.

<sup>69</sup> The National Archives, C104/231, Chancery Masters’ Exhibits, Whitcombe v Webster, ‘A Catalogue of all the Valuable Stock in Trade of that Well Known and Celebrated Artist, Mr Diedric Nicolaus Anderson’.

entertainment, a means of acquiring goods, and a means of acquiring social capital.<sup>70</sup> As such, they were fashionable and valued highly in the perceived hierarchy of the different forms of retailing. The language of auction catalogues was carefully selected to attract a particular audience, whether tradesmen looking to expand their stock in trade, or members of the public looking for household goods or a unique piece of quality metalware. Advertisements were also designed to advertise particular objects to their advantage, and so emphasised the quality, curiosity and workmanship of individual objects. This supports the view that the second-hand trade did not just involve the trade of old, unfashionable and inferior quality goods.<sup>71</sup> Instead, auctions provided the opportunity for consumers to possess a range of luxury goods, semi-luxuries and hardware.

Second-hand goods could also be sold in a lottery, in a similar manner to auctions. This was another informal method of acquiring metalware beyond the shop space that was able to flexibly adapt based on supply and demand. Metalware was a popular type of object sold by lottery because of its intrinsic value and the close relationship between silver and money. One lottery in 1726 was advertised on a handbill, that described the lottery as ‘a voluntary SUBSCRIPTION for purchasing these following GOODS’, where ‘Two thousand subscribers, paying two shillings and

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<sup>70</sup> Thomas Ketelsen, “Art Auctions in Germany during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century,” in *Art Markets in Europe, 1400-1800*, ed. Michael North and David Ormrod, (Farnham: Ashgate, 1998), 131-138; and Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, especially 169, 204.

<sup>71</sup> Natacha Coquery, “The Semi-Luxury Market, Shoppers and Social Diffusion: Marketing Chinoiserie in Eighteenth Century Paris”, in *Fashioning Old and New: Changing Consumer Patterns in Western Europe, 1650-1900*, ed. Bruno Blondé, Natacha Coquery, Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 128.

six-pence each' could enter a drawer in which 'Three hundred will be advantageous'.<sup>72</sup> Subscribers had a chance to win a range of objects, which were listed on the advertisement alongside their value, from a new silver tankard worth £10, to 17 snuff boxes worth £1 each, as well as watches, rings and spoons. Lotteries were organised on a regional basis, and in the case of the 1726 lottery, the advertisement stated that 'tickets will be given out, and subscriptions taken at most towns in Hampshire'. This was an unusual way of acquiring metalware, where the consumer was not buying a particular product. Like an auction, the acquiring of the product through a lottery was intertwined with the excitement of the event.

### **7.3.3 The Second-hand Trade**

The second-hand trade was intertwined with the wider retail network. 'New' goods were not always brand new, and new and old goods were regularly retailed alongside one another.<sup>73</sup> For example, Martha Braithwaite's inventory for her goldsmith's shop listed a number of old or second-hand goods alongside a wide range of plate and toys.<sup>74</sup> It included '6 odd stone buttons sett in gold' valued at £1 10s 6d; a 'mettle watch chaind' valued at £3 10s; and '8 old cains and 4 old sword blades' valued collectively at 6s. Many retailers also took old metalware in exchange, or in part payment of, new

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<sup>72</sup> Hampshire County Archives, 202M85/7/7/3, 'Advertisement for Voluntary Subscription to Purchase a Number of Silver, Gold and Pewter Objects', c. 1726.

<sup>73</sup> Second-hand goods were frequently advertised alongside new products on trade cards, as shown in chapter 6 of this thesis. See also, Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme, eds., *Modernity and the Second-hand Trade: European Consumption Cultures and Practices 1700-1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 27.

<sup>74</sup> The National Archives, C105/5, Chancery Masters' Exhibits, Braithwaite v Taylor, 'Accounts of Administrator of Martha Braithwaite and Inventories', 1746.



goods. For example, the trade card of the silversmith and jeweller A.H. Dry explained that ‘old gold & silver’ could be ‘bought & taken in exchange’.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, both old and new metalware was valued in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Metalware had a clear use-value, demonstrated by the way in which second-hand goods were bought and sold, as well as an intrinsic value that meant that even the most worn-out, broken, or damaged goods, could be sold and recycled.

There were also dedicated pawnbrokers, who lent money on the exchange of objects and dealt in second-hand goods, who had their own retail spaces as seen by the trade card of John Flude a pawnbroker and silversmith (Figure 7.7).



**Figure 7.7: Trade Card of John Flude, 1780, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/FLUDE.**

<sup>75</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/DRY, Trade Card of A.H. Dry.

The trade card advertised that Flude ‘lends money on plate, watches, jewells, wearing apparel, household goods & c.’. This range of goods is displayed on the trade card in the shop window, where there is an emphasis upon the textiles and the metalware that is on show on boards inside and outside the shop. Although pawnbrokers were not exclusively involved in the metalware trade, and dealt in a range of household goods, there was a close relationship between goldsmiths, pawnbrokers and bankers.<sup>76</sup> This was because of the intrinsic value of metalware, and the ease with which it could be melted into ready money or recycled into new objects. Metalware made up a significant proportion of the second-hand trade. Beverly Lemire shows that metalware accounted for 8.13 percent of goods pawned in London from 1667 to 1671, second only to clothing.<sup>77</sup>

In pawnshops, money was loaned in exchange for goods, which were kept and sold if loans were not repaid and the object was not collected. This can be seen in Robert Dodsley’s play, *The Toy-Shop*, where the Master of a pawnshop rejoiced that he has had a ‘good day of it’ when finding out a woman had died and not collected her pawned watch. He exclaimed:

I have had a tolerable good day of it to-day. A gold watch, five and thirty guineas - let me see - what did that watch stand me in? - Where is it? O here - lent to lady Basset eighteen guineas upon her gold watch. Aye, she died and never redeemed it.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> David Mitchell, ed., *Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Bankers: Innovation and the Transfer of Skill 1550 to 1750* (Oxford: Alden Press, 1995).

<sup>77</sup> Lemire, “Plebeian Commercial Circuits,” 252.

<sup>78</sup> Robert Dodsley, *The Toy-Shop* (London: W. Oxlade, 1775), 9.

Newspapers advertised when pawnbrokers demanded payment on their loans. For example, *The London Gazette* warned in 1701 that ‘all persons that have any jewels, plate or other goods pawned to Mr Thos Sturt, goldsmith in Castle Yard Holborn are desired to redeem them by 24 June next or they’ll be dispos’d of - he having left off taking in pawns’.<sup>79</sup> Pawnshops could therefore provide a lucrative business. In contrast to many of the other forms of retailing, the emphasis in pawnshops is on the intrinsic value of metalware.

## 7.4 Selling

The expanding retail networks and increasing consumption of consumer goods impacted on shopping spaces within urban and provincial towns. The location of the shop became increasingly important in the marketing and retailing of metalware, especially as particular areas established their reputation for selling different types of product. Different streets and regions were known for selling the best quality, or most fashionable metalware. For example, in London, new shopping streets in Piccadilly, St James’s, and Westminster superseded Cheapside, Fleet Street, and the Strand by the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>80</sup> Other towns, in particular Birmingham and Sheffield, developed their reputation for the retail of quality metalware. This is reflected in the number of retailers associated with the metalware trade in these two towns:

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<sup>79</sup> *The London Gazette*, 3 April 1701.

<sup>80</sup> Charles Harvey, Edmund M. Green and Penelope J. Corfield, “Continuity, Change, and Specialization within Metropolitan London: The Economy of Westminster, 1750-1820,” *Economic History Review* 52/3 (1999), 469; Alison Adburgham, *Shopping in Style: London from the Restoration to Edwardian Elegance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979); and Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 157.

Birmingham had 57 toy-makers, 25 jewellers, 12 cutlers, 34 ironmongers, 52 buckle-makers, 108 button-makers, 25 japanners; and in Sheffield, there were 203 cutlers, 16 silver/ silver plate manufacturers, 26 razor-makers, 5 inkstand makers and 13 button-makers.<sup>81</sup>

Trade directories were published as a tool for customers and tourists to navigate these expanding shopping spaces, and were regularly updated and re-published to give their readers the knowledge to navigate their way around the most fashionable shops. For example, James Bisset's trade directory of Birmingham, first published in 1800, was produced in order to promote the interests of Birmingham and assist the 'strangers or travers, who occasionally visit the town, and who are often anxious to gain permission to see the most noted manufactories of the place'.<sup>82</sup> In many cases, trade directories simply listed the types of shops and locations; at least, they listed those who paid to have the privilege. However, Bisset's *Magnificent Directory* was elaborately decorated with maps, trade cards, images of shopping streets and shop fronts. It also contained images of production and workshops, which could also be toured and were used to entice visitors who wanted to see first-hand the technological advancements that gave English manufactures their success in the eighteenth century. In this way, retailers helped direct consumers in the purchasing of metalware.

Retailers set aside new spaces for consumers to purchase metalware and inspect goods more closely. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the public were encouraged to view and inspect the objects that were for sale in an auction. Permanent

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<sup>81</sup> Figures from *Sketchley's Birmingham Directory* (Birmingham, 1767), in Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 188.

<sup>82</sup> James Bisset, *Bisset's Poetic Survey Round Birmingham. Accompanied by A Magnificent Directory* (Birmingham: Swinney and Hawkins, 1800), 63.

retail spaces also expanded to include separate rooms or areas in which consumers were encouraged to demonstrate their knowledge when inspecting an object.<sup>83</sup> These spaces were often intimate and highly decorative, which provided an environment in which retailers could improve the consumer experience, and associate themselves with quality, fashionability and sociability.<sup>84</sup> Consumers were required to demonstrate their knowledge and skill when inspecting the quality of objects. As Helen Berry explains, ‘sight, touch and even smell were important means of gauging first-hand the quality of the goods on offer’.<sup>85</sup> It also acted to move the burden of quality control onto the consumer. Consumers often relied on retailers to inform them of the quality of the goods that were for sale, and keep them up to date with the most fashionable products.<sup>86</sup> The retailer had to be trusted to be honest, but there were instances where consumers accused shopkeepers of deliberately keeping low light levels in the shop in order to hide the poor quality of their goods.<sup>87</sup> Retailers used shopping spaces to appeal to the consumer and direct their shopping experience, but also to develop their reputation as the providers of quality metalware.

There was a perceived hierarchy to the different methods of retailing, where some retailing methods were seen as more trustworthy, polite, fashionable and of high quality, than others. This was often affected by wider discussion of morality, as well as debates about quality. However, retailers could try to manipulate how consumers

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<sup>83</sup> The consumer knowledge of metalware, and their inspection of goods will be analysed in more depth in chapter 8.

<sup>84</sup> Hann and Stobart, “Sites of Consumption,” 180.

<sup>85</sup> Berry, “Polite Consumption,” 387.

<sup>86</sup> Van Damme, “From a ‘Knowledgeable’ Salesman towards a ‘Recognizable’ Product?” 84; and Hann and Stobart, “Sites of Consumption,” 179.

<sup>87</sup> Berry, “Polite Consumption,” 387.

perceived them. These debates surrounding the different methods of retailing spread into popular culture, such as literature, ballads and plays, especially discussions about the morality and frivolity of shopping. Shop-assistants and servants, in particular, were often painted as deceptive or immoral. In the 1775 play *The Toy-Shop*, a shop-worker describes how he has had to develop a persona in order to boost the reputation of the shop. He describes how:

The odd character I have acquired by this rough kind of sincerity and plain dealing, together with the whimsical humour of moralizing upon every trifle I sell, are the things, which by raising people's curiosity, furnish me with all my customers.<sup>88</sup>

The play mocks the emphasis upon curiosity and novelty in the retailing and consumption of consumer goods. It also suggests that shopkeepers had a habit of exaggerating, or putting on a show rather than focusing upon the qualities of the object. Whilst this play was clearly satirical and exaggerated, it drew upon contemporary debates about the trustworthiness of retailers and their ability to guarantee the quality of their goods.

### **7.5 Guaranteeing Quality**

It was crucial for retailers to develop their reputation as trustworthy individuals who were a good judge of quality.<sup>89</sup> With the rise of retailers and middle-men, reputation

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<sup>88</sup> Dodsley, *The Toy-Shop*, 23.

<sup>89</sup> Walsh, "Shopping in Early Modern London," 93.

became increasingly important. Not all customers purchased their metalware in person from a retail space and many orders were placed from a distance. This meant that customers would often not have seen the products, and so needed to be reassured of product quality and of the trustworthiness and skill of the producer and retailer.<sup>90</sup> Literature suggests that retailers acted as the most effective guarantee of quality because the goods were checked at each stage of finishing and exchange.<sup>91</sup> However, this literature does not acknowledge the crucial role of the producer-retailer in defining quality, whose methods arguably undermined the reputation for quality and variety put forward by ordinary retailers. Producer-retailers sought to differentiate themselves from the increasingly crowded retail networks by claiming to be able to better guarantee product quality. They argued that they had a better control over the production process, and they added their sponsor's mark to their products which acted as a guarantee of quality.

Producer-retailers used advertisements in newspapers and their trade cards to suggest that their role as producer and retailer acted as a more effective form of quality control and guarantee of workmanship, than products that were sold by retailers or middle-men. Producers wanted to reassure consumers that they could trust in their ability and the quality of their workmanship. John Heany, a pewterer and brazier, published in a newspaper advertisement that he 'continues to manufacture and sell all sorts of pewter, brass and copper goods, which being made under his own immediate inspection, he is enabled to engage every article he sells, and to dispose of them on the

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<sup>90</sup> John Styles, "Manufacturing, Consumption and Design in Eighteenth-Century England," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1994), 527; and Hann and Stobart, "Sites of Consumption," 179.

<sup>91</sup> Van Damme, "Changing Consumer Preferences," 202; and Walsh, "Shopping in Early Modern London," 93.

lowest terms'.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, not only were goods of a higher quality but they were also of a lower price because they avoided the profit-making retailers. The producer claimed to be able to better guarantee the quality of the object, because they were made 'under his own immediate inspection'.

Producers also argued that they were able to guarantee quality when their sponsor's mark was stamped on their product. The use of sponsors' marks was an important aspect of the regulation of the trade, and was a unique way in which certain types of metalware, such as silver and pewter, were able to convey their quality.<sup>93</sup> Some advertisements and trade cards capitalised on the understanding of marks as a sign of quality, and included the image of the sponsor's mark of the producer in their design. This was most common within advertising in the cutlers' trade, as seen by the trade card of Henry Patten (Figure 7.8). Patten's trade card clearly illustrates his sponsor's mark: the initials H.P with a crown. Upon a closer look, this mark is also seen displayed on many of the small objects across the trade card. Regulatory marks were therefore used within advertising, and were clearly communicated to the consumer. Their initial purpose was to convey quality through public trust in the guilds' process of registering cutlers' marks.<sup>94</sup> However, their subsequent usage transcends their initial regulatory role. It can also be seen as a form of branding in which producers established their own reputation based upon their name, their products, and their mark.

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<sup>92</sup> *Hibernian Journal; Or, Chronicle of Liberty*, 15 January 1776.

<sup>93</sup> As shown in chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>94</sup> As argued in chapter 2. See also, Bert De Munck, "The Agency of Branding and the Location of Value: Hallmarks and Monograms in Early Modern Tableware Industries," *Business History* 54/7 (2012): 1055-1076.





**Figure 7.8: Trade Card of Henry Patten, c. 1760, London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/PATTEN.**

If defined in this way, branding can be seen across cultures throughout history, through the marking, labelling and packaging of consumer goods.<sup>95</sup> As Van Damme argues, branding aimed to control unobservable raw materials, but with the expansion of the trade and the integration of new materials, branding also drew upon fashion.<sup>96</sup> Claire Walsh argues that it was difficult to completely standardise products, and so few goods

<sup>95</sup> Andrew Bevan and David Wengrow, eds., *Cultures of Commodity Branding* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2010).

<sup>96</sup> Van Damme, "From a 'Knowledgeable' Salesman towards a 'Recognizable' Product?" 87, 99.

were branded.<sup>97</sup> However, Walsh's focus upon retailing leads her to focus upon goods that were marketed by retailers, rather than producer-retailers. Nevertheless, these examples within the metalware trade show that branding was possible, and producers and retailers could construct individual reputation.

Producers also circulated information about their marks in newspaper advertisements. A trade card by the Sheffield cutler Isaiah Kemp, explicitly noted that 'Those Mark'd with my Name, will be warranted Good'.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, Nicholas Butler, an Engraver and copper plate printer, advertised that 'as Butler engraves his own work, he hopes its neatness and the variety of his fancies will merit public favour. N.B. he has now making, marked with his own name, silver coloured metal buttons, superior in quality to any thing of the kind ever offered to the public'.<sup>99</sup> This suggests that marks were understood by the consumer as a guarantee of the producer and of the quality of metalware. This discussion also reflects how quality was associated with product variety and production.

Producers were protective of their marks and used advertisements to protect their reputation and warn the public when another producer or retailer was fraudulently using their own mark.<sup>100</sup> Richard Singleton, a cork-screw maker and cutler in Dublin advertised in the *Hibernian Journal* that,

Whereas there has been of late offered to sale in this city and other parts  
of this kingdom by toy men, hawkers and pedlers, a bad and corse kind  
of cork screws and other goods marked with my name and sold for my

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<sup>97</sup> Walsh, "The Advertising and Marketing of Consumer Goods," 80.

<sup>98</sup> Sheffield Millennium Gallery, 2004.1286, Trade Card of Isaiah Kemp, c. 1749-1787.

<sup>99</sup> *Hibernian Journal; Or, Chronicle of Liberty*, 15 January 1776.

<sup>100</sup> The use of newspaper advertisements to defend reputation is also discussed in chapter 5.

work. - I take this opportunity of assuring the publick that I now serve no toy-shop nor ever did or ever will sell any of my work to any hawker or pedlar, and am determined to prosecute with the utmost severity those that shall dare to sell for my work such bad and counterfeit work.<sup>101</sup>

Singleton's advertisement was especially critical of 'hawkers and pedlers', who he blames for the circulation of poor-quality metalware. Although marks could be counterfeited and were not automatically a guarantee of quality, with careful attention and the help of newspaper advertisements, producers could construct their reputation and the public knowledge of their marks.

The way in which many transactions were arranged under credit, or objects were sent to consumers presumptively to try and entice their purchase even when they were not requested, also acted as a guarantee of quality. As Gary Richardson suggests, the conspicuous characteristics of an object could also establish reputation and act as a form of branding.<sup>102</sup> Boulton, sent one customer 'a great variety of other elegant & usefull ornaments', in order to 'give you an opportunity of chusing from among our collection such as might perhaps be better than those you order'd'.<sup>103</sup> Boulton here suggests that there was a value in the fashionability and aesthetics of the objects.

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<sup>101</sup> *Dublin Courier*, 27 December 1762.

<sup>102</sup> Gary Richardson, "Brand Names before the Industrial Revolution," *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper*, No. 13930 (2008), 4.

<sup>103</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to J.G. Griffin Ban', 27 March 1771.

Like in the discussions of pawnbroking, there was also an appreciation of the intrinsic value of metalware. Boulton wrote to Mr Hall to say that,

You have my full consent to acquaint the whole of your customers with the manner of the snuffers being made, and if any of them are dissatisfied with the goods, I will take them again provided/ They have not been used or defaced... for I am conscious of there being an intrinsic value in silver & workmanship.<sup>104</sup>

Boulton also emphasised the value of workmanship. Another producer-retailer, an ironmonger called Bickley, allowed his goods to be returned if the consumer was not satisfied. Bickley's trade card advertised his patented iron warming pans, which 'will never rust, are free from any kind of smell, neither do they require any cleaning'.<sup>105</sup> More importantly, it emphasised that 'the utility of these pans require some little explanation, but a fair trial will best recommend them', and that 'if not found to give entire satisfaction, the money should be returned'. Of course, not all producers or retailers allowed the return of their goods. However, it was a useful strategy when marketing new products, as it worked to reassure the consumer of its quality. It allowed producer-retailers to establish their position in the hierarchy of retailing, and persuade the public that they could be trusted to sell the best quality metalware.

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<sup>104</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/36, 'Letter Benjamin May to Matthew Boulton' [Copy Letter Benjamin May to John Carter 1 May 1771], 21 April 1773.

<sup>105</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/BIC, Trade Card of Bickley.

## **Conclusion**

The retailing of metalware was intertwined with debates about quality in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in which variety, novelty and fashionability were increasingly important. The expansion of the trade and increase in consumer demand led to expanding retailing networks, which, as this chapter has shown, benefitted from new products, materials and fashions. There were new methods of designing shop spaces and displaying products, in reality and in print, which worked to enhance the variety, novelty and quality of metalware. These changes in consumer experience influenced the ways in which the public purchased metalware and perceived quality. Consumers were increasingly relied upon to assess quality, and were given the opportunity to inspect objects within the shop space and before an auction. Not only were goods valued because of their intrinsic value, but they were also valued because of their fashionability, novelty and workmanship. Moreover, there were new debates about who could be trusted to sell the most fashionable and best-quality goods, in which producer-retailers established themselves as the providers of quality metalware.

## Chapter 8.

### Consumer Knowledge: Possessing, Inspecting and Maintaining Quality

Consumers were interested, and invested in, the quality of metalware. Precious metals, especially gold and silver, were used as a form of value-storing, and so consumers needed to trust in their intrinsic value, but increasingly consumers were also interested in the fashionability and social value of particular objects.<sup>1</sup> This thesis has shown that the expansion of the trade and the introduction of new products and materials, influenced changes in regulation within the guilds that placed a greater burden of quality control on the consumer, and caused the development of marketing and advertising that opened new lines of communication between producer and consumer. As a result, consumers became increasingly involved in the deliberation of quality, and were expected to possess knowledge about metalware.

Consumers often had an intimate knowledge of their possessions. This included knowledge of the material qualities of metalware, but also details about production, the marks on objects, and the fashionability or social value of particular products or materials. A knowledge of the tangible and intangible qualities of

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<sup>1</sup> Bruno Blondé and Ilja Van Damme, “Fashioning Old and New or Moulding the Material Culture of Europe (Late Seventeenth-Early Nineteenth Centuries),” in *Fashioning Old and New: Changing Consumer Patterns in Western Europe, 1650-1900*, ed. Bruno Blondé, Natacha Coquery, Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 9; and Jan de Vries, “Luxury in the Dutch Golden Age in Theory and Practice,” in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, ed. Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 43.

metalware was equally important. This chapter argues that it was not just the consumers of metalware who encountered metal goods and possessed knowledge of its quality, but the wider public. Members of the social elite toured metalware manufactories; servants handled their masters' metalware and knew how to repair and clean it; curious individuals sought out new proto-scientific and material knowledge; those who read newspapers and other publications were kept informed of the latest guild regulations and parliamentary debates about quality; and the majority of the population were exposed to metalware in houses, taverns and shop windows. This builds upon recent interest in the history of consumption, and provides a more nuanced view of how consumer goods circulated.<sup>2</sup> The object life-cycle was not linear: objects passed through the hands of owners, servants, cleaners, engravers, neighbours, and thieves. They might also return to producers or retailers. Therefore, consumers and the wider public was able to contribute to perceptions of quality.

The relationship between subject and object - between person and possession - was highly complex. The role of subject and object could be interchangeable, and they had a hold on one another: 'to treat a subject like an object is to reify, objectify. To treat an object like a subject is to idolize, fetishize'.<sup>3</sup> The object had the ability to imprint on the owner, just as the owner could imprint on an object. In particular, people

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Trentmann, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, ed. Frank Trentmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012), 1-22; Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson, eds., *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); and Sara Horrell, Jane Humphries and Ken Sneath, "Consumption Conundrums Unravelling," *Economic History Review* 68/3 (2015): 830-857.

<sup>3</sup> Margreta De Grazia, Maureen Quilligan and Peter Stallybrass, "Introduction," in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Margreta De Grazia, Maureen Quilligan and Peter Stallybrass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3.

could use an object's social value or fashionability to try and construct their identities in public and in private.<sup>4</sup> This required a knowledge of the symbolic and social meanings of particular products and materials. Historians have begun to investigate these different knowledge networks that emerged and developed around the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> Knowledge could be 'codified' or 'uncodified', in the public consciousness or stored in external devices.<sup>6</sup> It is especially difficult to assess what might have been 'everyday' or 'common' knowledge that was held by consumers and the wider public.

It is usually only in exceptional circumstances that records of material knowledge have survived, for example, when objects were lost or stolen. It is possible to get an insight into the objects that were stolen through the records of theft cases that are documented in the Old Bailey records.<sup>7</sup> These cases vary in the level of detail that

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<sup>4</sup> Hannah Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 36; and Trentmann, "Introduction," 16.

<sup>5</sup> Although they begin to analyse the communication between producer and consumer, literature can be divided between those that focus on consumer knowledge and those that focus on knowledge of production. For literature that analyses consumer knowledge, see for example, Marina Bianchi, *The Active Consumer: Novelty and Surprise in Consumer Choice* (London: Routledge, 1998), 114; and Ludmilla Jordanova, *The Look of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 211. For literature that focuses on knowledge of production, see Pamela H. Smith and Benjamin Schmidt, eds., *Making Knowledge in Early Modern Europe: Practices, Objects, and Texts, 1400-1800* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2007); and Liliane Hilaire-Pérez and Catherine Verna, "Dissemination of Technical Knowledge in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era: New Approaches and Methodological Issues," *Technology and Culture* 47/3 (2006): 536-565.

<sup>6</sup> Joel Mokyr, *The Gifts of Athena: Historical Origins of the Knowledge Economy* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 4, 63; and Maxine Berg, "The Genesis of 'Useful Knowledge'," *History of Science* 45/2 (2007), 126.

<sup>7</sup> Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Emsley, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, et al., *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 1674-1913* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org)). For a



they record, nevertheless, give intimate accounts of objects that were stolen and a vast array of incidental information when witnesses were required to prove their knowledge of an object and its owner in order to show that a theft had occurred.<sup>8</sup> Account books, letters, plays and poems can also give an insight into the popular culture and the material knowledge of metalware. Moreover, the objects themselves have the potential to communicate information about how they were perceived and possessed through their materiality, design, marks and inscriptions.<sup>9</sup>

This chapter explores the relationship between consumers and their possessions. The first part investigates how consumers assessed quality, from their knowledge of the production and regulation of metalware, to the inspection of the goods themselves. The second half of this chapter looks more closely at consumer knowledge and the demand for metalware. It will analyse the rise of fashion and aesthetic value and the symbolic and social value of metalware, which contributed to the changing perception of quality. Finally, it examines consumers' material knowledge, through their proto-scientific knowledge and an awareness of the durability, maintenance and repair of possessions.

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history of the Old Bailey, see: Theresa Murphy, *The Old Bailey: Eight Centuries of Crime, Cruelty and Corruption* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> However, they must be read with caution, with an understanding of potential manipulations. The documents are written by a court clerk, based upon an interpretation of the statement given by the witness, rather than a direct transcription. Witness statements might also be coerced, exaggerated or completely fabricated.

<sup>9</sup> Mary C. Beaudry, 'Bodkin Biographies,' in *The Materiality of Individuality: Archaeological Studies of Individual Lives*, ed. Carolyn L. White (London: Springer, 2009), 98; and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 135.

## 8.1 Assessing Quality

Our knowledge of the relationship between subject and object has been affected by the wider history of how objects, and their quality, have been researched and written about. The nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries saw the rise of collecting and connoisseurship, and so there was an interest in the marks on objects but with a focus upon identification.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, particularly within art historical scholarship, there has been an increasing awareness of the consumer ability to assess quality, authenticity and value through their knowledge of these marks. However, in order to understand how quality was perceived in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is necessary to look in more depth at the forms of everyday and material knowledge that existed, that might be lost to us today.

The literature has begun to explore the knowledge and ability some individuals had, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to inspect and interpret the quality and authenticity of an object.<sup>11</sup> However, the detail of this knowledge was sometimes brought into question. While some consumers possessed extensive knowledge about particular objects, others failed in their attempts to judge value, determine authenticity and understand the marks on objects. The lack of ability to assess quality was satirised in the eighteenth century, when writers such as Samuel Foote and Hannah Cowley

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<sup>10</sup> Howard H. Cotterell, *Old Pewter: Its Makers and Marks in England, Scotland and Ireland* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1929); Charles Jackson, *English Goldsmiths and their Marks* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1905); and William Chaffers, *Hallmarks on Gold and Silver Plate* (London: J. Davy & Sons, 1863).

<sup>11</sup> Jordanova, *The Look of the Past*, 211; and Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), 14.

mocked the failure of some consumers to determine authenticity and taste.<sup>12</sup> With the expansion of the metalware trade, Bert De Munck suggests that those assessing the quality of consumer goods looked for the retailer of the product, rather than its maker, in the eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup> However, as this chapter shows, consumers often held knowledge about production and regulation, and were able to use that knowledge to assess quality and identify their possessions.

## 8.2 Knowledge of Production

Production and consumption were intertwined. Producers could be consumers; they had their own personal possessions, and asserted their ownership over the products and materials that they produced. Producers also maintained their relationship with their products, and maintained their knowledge of objects even once they had been sold and passed onto the consumer. For instance, they were often called upon to clean, repair, and re-fashion metalware. Individual producers, shopkeepers, and members of the guilds were also asked to identify stolen goods and the owner of an object, and they were requested to advertise lost and stolen goods through handbills and by word-of-mouth.<sup>14</sup> For example, in the case of a stolen buckle, David Nash, a beadle of

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<sup>12</sup> Angela Escott, "A Female Sculptor and Connoisseur: Artistic Self-fashioning and the Exposure of Connoisseurship, Collecting and Concupiscence," in *Women and Material Culture 1660-1830*, ed. Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 108.

<sup>13</sup> Bert De Munck, "The Agency of Branding and the Location of Value: Hallmarks and Monograms in Early Modern Tableware Industries," *Business History* 54/7 (2012), 1068.

<sup>14</sup> Judy Jowett, *The Warning Carriers: How the Messengers of the Goldsmiths' Company Warned the Luxury Trades of Criminal Activities in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Cromwell Press, 2005), 13, 18.

Goldsmiths' Hall, explained that 'a constable came to ask me who was the maker of two odd buckles'.<sup>15</sup> Producers were called upon to testify to the ownership of stolen goods in court. Christopher Pinchbeck, in his testimony and identification of stolen metal toys, said that 'I am certain [they] are mine, for I made them several years ago, and there were none of them made before nor since; they are marked at the bottom with the two initial letters of my name'.<sup>16</sup> With the expansion of production and an increasing dependence on subcontractors and journeymen, it would have been more difficult to prove ownership and identify individual objects that were made. James Tookey, a London silversmith, explained his doubt that 'I know these were made at my shop, but I work for many other people besides the prosecutrix'.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, many producers still maintained their knowledge of their products and a relationship with the consumer. Their testimonies demonstrate the continued association of producers with their products. The sponsors' marks that were used to identify a product and its producer, were intertwined with the perception of quality, because they were used to regulate the quality of production.<sup>18</sup> This makes it possible to better understand the transfer of knowledge and the relationship between subject and object, as objects circulated throughout their life-cycles.

Consumers were also able to use their knowledge of an object, its producer and their mark, to prove their ownership of an object. For example, a bailiff asked the

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<sup>15</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, December 1748, trial of William Tompson (t17481207-25).

<sup>16</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, October 1744, trial of Peter Delgens (t17441017-10).

<sup>17</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, December 1763, trial of Robert Stephenson (t17641207-5).

<sup>18</sup> As this thesis has shown, especially in chapters 1, 2 and 5, the guilds used sponsors' marks to identify and prosecute the producer of substandard ware, and the consumer was increasingly encouraged to identify the sponsor's mark as a guarantee of quality.

prosecutor to describe a stolen watch, and they ‘said the Maker’s name was Lugg, and he shew’d... a piece of string that match’d with the string of the watch’.<sup>19</sup> In other cases, the absence of knowledge was used to discover that the retrieved object did not belong to the suspected thief. Edward Roberts was suspected of stealing a silver watch and snuff-box by a constable because ‘he said he had the Watch these five years, but after it was seiz’d he could not tell any Marks or the Maker’s Name’.<sup>20</sup> The knowledge of a maker therefore had the potential to be used as proof of ownership. In particular, watches, stockings and shoes stand out in the Old Bailey as objects that had specific maker’s marks, which were often used to show the owner’s knowledge and ownership. Although objects were not marked with this purpose in mind, the way in which they could be identified shows that producers and consumers alike possessed knowledge of a product, and the sponsors’ marks on silver and pewter. Therefore, the testimonies identifying an object open our eyes to the exchange of knowledge that existed between producer and consumer.

Producers and consumers sought new ways of communicating and exchanging knowledge. Details about production circulated in the marketing and advertising of metal goods.<sup>21</sup> Trade cards and advertisements, travel accounts and the objects themselves, created a public perception of workmanship. This occurred in the metalware trade, but also the ceramics and porcelain trades, each of which had a regional emphasis as different areas developed their reputation as manufacturing

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<sup>19</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, September 1732, trial of Charles Patrick and William Meads (t17320906-26).

<sup>20</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, August 1728, trial of Edward Roberts (t17280828-49).

<sup>21</sup> See chapter 5.

towns.<sup>22</sup> Manufacturers benefited from the consumer interest in production, and their search for new spaces to entertain and educate themselves.<sup>23</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, producers across Birmingham opened the doors of their manufactories and workshops to encourage and facilitate the consumer interest in production.<sup>24</sup> Consumers were able to better educate themselves about new products, materials and machinery, and producers could communicate with consumers and attempt to control consumer perceptions of taste, fashionability and quality. For example, Matthew Boulton allowed the curious public, members of the social elite and foreign visitors to tour his Soho Manufactory, who were ‘very desirous to see the manufactures’.<sup>25</sup> Rather than disrupting the workmen, the public were taken to showrooms, which were specifically designed for that purpose. Boulton wrote to John Scale, a business partner, with instructions for the decoration of the showroom, he wrote that he:

Wishes Mr S: would send for the plasterer who did the counting house  
(he believes his name is Higginson) & orders the long ware house to be

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<sup>22</sup> Kate Smith, “The Potter’s Skill: Perceptions of Workmanship in the English Ceramic Industries, 1760-1800,” Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, May 2010.

<sup>23</sup> John Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, [1997] 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Peter Jones, “‘I had L[or]ds and Ladys to wait on yesterday...’: Visitors to the Soho Manufactory,” in *Matthew Boulton: Selling what all the World Desires*, ed. Shena Mason (London: Yale University Press and Birmingham City Council, 2009), 71-80; Hilaire-Pérez and Verna, “Dissemination of Technical Knowledge,” 541; and Giorgio Riello and Patrick K. O’Brien, “The Future is Another Country: Offshore Views of the British Industrial Revolution,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 22/1 (2009), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/23/133, ‘Letter Mr Falconer to Matthew Boulton’, 29 June 1769, ff. 1-2.

stript of all its plaster both Walls & Ceilings except the part where the Cabinetts are to stand. B: would have it plasterd as a good room should be viz flat & square with a plain moulding round ye beams. I presume we shall have many of ye nobility at Soho this summer & therefore wish to receive them in a genteel room & to shew them a proper assortment of things.<sup>26</sup>

Boulton's showroom was designed to be 'genteel' and was part of the larger neo-classical building of the Soho Manufactory, which was an imposing and impressive building to view. Architecture can be seen as yet another form of marketing. Jonathan Schroeder looks to present-day banks to show how Danske bank drew upon classical architecture to establish its brand, and appeal to potential customers.<sup>27</sup>

The reputation of the Soho Manufactory and showroom successfully circulated, and people wrote to Boulton to request visits. William Falconer, for example, wrote to Boulton on 29 June 1769 to recommend his acquaintance 'Mr Hall a Gentleman of this country who is going to B[irmingham] & is very desirous to see the manuf-actures of it in the highest perfection. In consequence of this I have taken the liberty to recommend him to a sight of your manufactory at Soho as being perhaps the most extraordinary thing of its kind in Europe'.<sup>28</sup> The visits were a successful

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<sup>26</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/23/262, General Correspondence 1750-73, 'Letter Matthew Boulton to John Scale', 1772.

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan E. Schroeder, "Brand Culture: Trade Marks, Marketing and Consumption," in *Trade Marks and Brands: An Interdisciplinary Critique*, ed. Lionel Bentley et. al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 161-176.

<sup>28</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/23/133, 'Letter Mr Falconer to Matthew Boulton', 29 June 1769, ff. 1-2.

marketing strategy, despite the time and expense that it required. Matthew Boulton complained in 1767 that:

During this summer scarcely a day hath passd without haveing one two or 3 company of foreigners or strangers to wait upon, as well as many of our nobility who are all much delighted wth the extension & regularity of our manufactory this hinders much of my time & is attended wth expence but it increases our correspondents & establishes our reputation.<sup>29</sup>

Producers therefore saw the benefit in taking the time to construct their public image and develop their relationship with the nobility, consumers and the wider public.

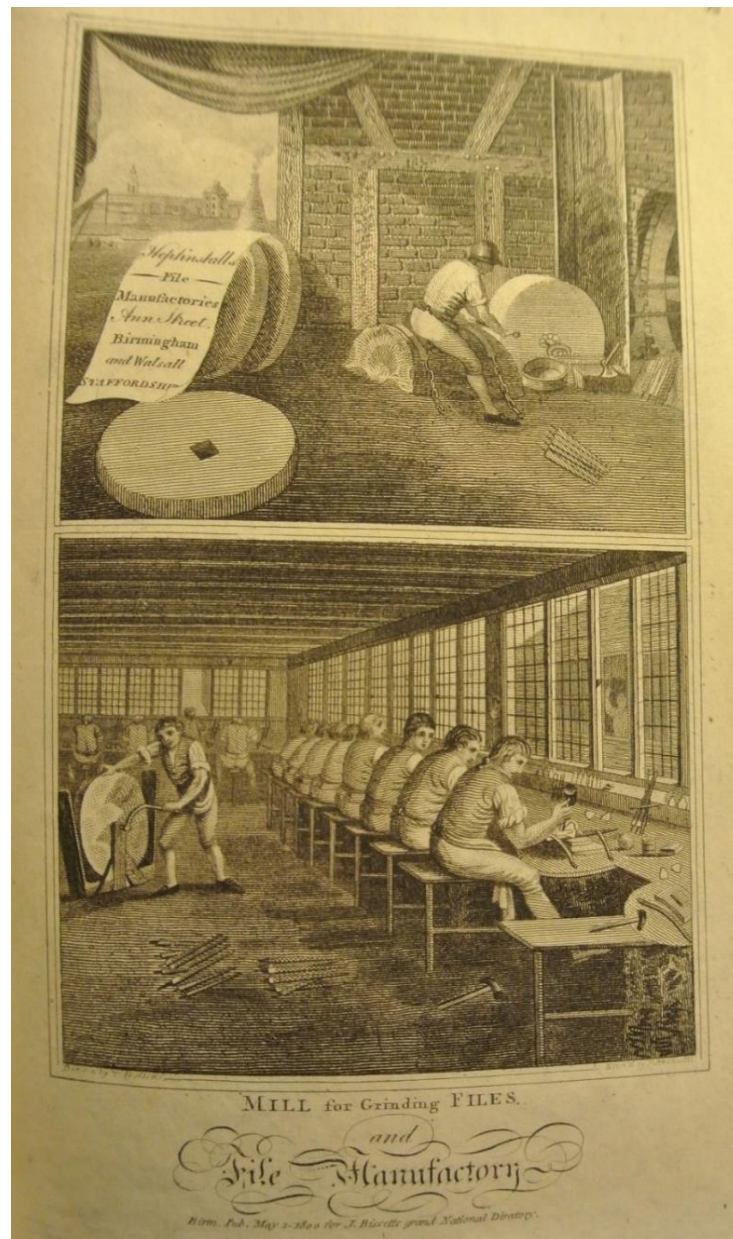
Trade directories and travel guides were also published to aid the development of regional reputation and promote the interests of producers to consumers. James Bisset's *Magnificent Directory* was published in order to benefit Birmingham and assist the 'strangers or travers, who occasionally visit the town, and who are often anxious to gain permission to see the most noted manufactories of the place'.<sup>30</sup> As well as a list of retailers and producers, there were a series of engravings that displayed shop fronts and locations across Birmingham, alongside workshops and manufactories and images of producers at work. For example, Bisset's *Magnificent Directory* contained a depiction of Hepinstall's File Manufactory (Figure 8.1).

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<sup>29</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/1/23, Letter Book 1766-8, 'Letter to Mr John Herman Ebbinghaus', 28 October 1767.

<sup>30</sup> James Bisset, *Bisset's Poetic Survey Round Birmingham. Accompanied by A Magnificent Directory* (Birmingham: Swinney and Hawkins, 1800), 63.





**Figure 8.1: Hepinstall's Mill for Grinding Files and File Manufactory, in James Bisset, *Bisset's Magnificent Guide, or, Grand Copperplate Directory, for the town of Birmingham* (Birmingham: R. Jabet, 1808).**

This image of the 'mill for grinding files and file manufactory' shows in detail the workmen and tools of the trade. In contrast to smaller workshops that were depicted on trade cards, seen in chapter 6, the image of the mill depicts the expansion of the trade and the beginnings of mass production. The representation of production, in person and in print, helped individual producers and manufacturing towns develop

their reputation. They increasingly communicated messages about producers and their products to capture the public imagination.

Production was part of the public sphere, and had an important place in popular culture. Especially around new manufacturing towns such as Birmingham, poets and playwrights drew upon the imagery, sounds and sights of production. Richard Jago, a Warwickshire clergyman and poet, included descriptions of regional production in his topographical poem *Edge-Hill*. He creates a picture of the metalware trade:

How the coarse Metal brightens into Fame,  
Shap'd by their plastic Hands! What Ornament!  
What various Use! See there the glitt'ring Knife  
Of temper'd Edge! The Scissars' double Shaft,  
Useless apart, in social Union join'd  
Each aiding each! Emblem how beautiful  
Of happy nuptial Leagues! The Button round,  
Plain, or imboss, or bright with steely Rays!  
Or oblong Buckle, on the lacker'd Shoe,  
With polish'd Lustre, bending elegant...<sup>31</sup>

In his poem, Jago drew upon the consumer interest in production in his vibrant descriptions of popular products, from scissors and knives, to buttons and buckles. In particular, he emphasises the attraction of metalware, from their 'various use' to aesthetic value, taste, novelty and workmanship.

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Jago, *Edge-Hill; Or, the Rural Prospect Delineated and Moralized. A Poem, in Four Books* (London, 1767), 115.

Attached to many of the editions of James Bisset's *Magnificent Directory* was his poem, *A Poetic Survey Round Birmingham*. Like Jago, Bisset combines a survey of the area with descriptions of important manufacturers and regional products. His poem exclaims:

SOHO! - where GENIUS and the ARTS preside,  
EUROPA's wonder and BRITANNIA's pride;  
Thy matchless works have rais'd Old England's fame,  
And future ages will record thy name;  
Each rival Nation shall to thee resign  
The PALM of TASTE, and own - 'tis justly thine;  
Whilst COMMERCE shall to thee an altar raise,  
And infant Genius lean to lisp thy praise:  
Whist Art and Science reign, they'll still proclaim  
THINE! Ever blended, with a BOULTON's name.<sup>32</sup>

The reader is therefore encouraged to view Boulton's Soho Manufactory as a symbol of national pride and commercial success, where taste, skill, and reputation were intertwined. By the mid-eighteenth century inventors were increasingly revered as heroes, and Boulton rose to this status when he was admired for his invention and genius.<sup>33</sup> Christine MacLeod suggests that this was a contrast to the seventeenth

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<sup>32</sup> James Bisset, *Bisset's Poetic Survey round Birmingham: With a Brief Description of the Different Curiosities and Manufactories of the Place* (Birmingham: Swinney and Hawkins, 1800), 12.

<sup>33</sup> Christine MacLeod, *Heroes of Invention: Technology, Liberalism and British Identity, 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1-2.

century, when invention was understood to be divine attribute, not accessible to the ordinary producer.<sup>34</sup> However, invention remained intertwined with the divine in Bisset's poem, which later describes the journey of mythical figures flying across the towns and countryside around Birmingham:

To see the PIN-WORKS then, the GODS repair,  
Nor wonder'd less at what they met with there,  
To find it was in any mortal's pow'r,  
To POINT, and CUT, twelve thousand PINS an hour...<sup>35</sup>

Footnotes to the poetic survey gave further details about specific manufacturers. In a footnote at the end of the passage, Bisset explained that 'the Author went to Mr. Phipson's Manufactory, to ascertain how many pin heads could be spun in a short space of time; when he saw a boy, about twelve years of age, form 7200, in three minutes'.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, not only did Bisset draw upon the public imagination and existing knowledge about regional and individual reputation, but the *Poetic Survey and Magnificent Directory* acted as means of exchanging knowledge between producer and consumer.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 25. See also, Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, "Technical Invention and Institutional Credit in France and Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century," *History and Technology* 16/3 (2000): 285-306.

<sup>35</sup> James Bisset, *Bisset's Poetic Survey round Birmingham. Accompanied by A Magnificent Directory* (Birmingham: Swinney and Hawkins, 1800), 29.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

With the rise of miscellanies, dictionaries and encyclopaedias, trade directories were one of many receptacles of knowledge.<sup>37</sup> The eighteenth century was ‘an age that prided itself on curiosity towards and knowledge of the material world’, where craftsmanship and skill were held in high esteem.<sup>38</sup> This especially appears to have been the case in the English metalware trades. The shift of importance from intrinsic quality to novelty and fashionability, sparked new debates about quality, in which producers used marketing and advertising to persuade the public that their new products and technology were desirable.<sup>39</sup>

### **8.3 Knowledge of Regulation**

Alongside details about production, consumers also possessed knowledge about the regulation of the metalware trade, and the regulatory marks that aimed to control and guarantee quality. With the expansion of the trade from the late-seventeenth century, the guilds experienced difficulty in sustaining effective regional searches, and so the consumer was increasingly called upon to detect quality and report fraudulent and

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<sup>37</sup> Nancy Cox, *Retailing and the Language of Goods 1550-1820* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); and Natacha Coquery, “The Language of Success: Marketing and Distributing Semi-Luxury Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris,” *Journal of Design History* 17/1 (2004), 73.

<sup>38</sup> Kate Smith, *Material Goods, Moving Hands: Perceiving Production in England, 1700-1830* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 13-16.

<sup>39</sup> See chapter 4. See also, Barbara Bettoni, “Usefulness, Ornamental Function and Novelty: Debates on Quality in Button and Buckle Manufacturing in Northern Italy (Eighteenth to Nineteenth Centuries),” in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture, 1500-1900*, ed. Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 171-207.

substandard metalware.<sup>40</sup> They were therefore required to understand how to inspect and interpret the quality of particular products or materials. Therefore, as well as controlling the intrinsic quality of metalware, regulatory marks intended to rectify ‘problems of information asymmetry’ in the production, distribution and consumption of consumer goods.<sup>41</sup>

Regulatory marks, such as hallmarks on silver and the X and crown on pewter, were designed to be a conspicuous presence on objects to act as a guarantee of quality and intrinsic value, supported by the political standing of the guilds.<sup>42</sup> Hallmarks, in particular, were often highly visible and were struck on the parts of objects that were on display, such as the handle of a spoon or the rim of a tankard (Figure 8.2). A *Still Life with Silver Tankard* (Figure 8.2), emulated the Dutch still life paintings of the seventeenth century and displayed a range of consumer goods, including a silver tankard with a London hallmark that is the central subject of the painting. The hallmark, a London hallmark for 1688, is clearly on display on the rim of the silver tankard to the viewer of the painting.

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<sup>40</sup> See chapter 2. See also, Christof Jeggle, “Labelling with Numbers? Weavers, Merchants and the Valuation of Linen in Seventeenth Century Munster,” in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture*, 52.

<sup>41</sup> Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna, “Locating and Dislocating Value: A Pragmatic Approach to Early Modern and Nineteenth-Century Economic Practices,” in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture*, 4.

<sup>42</sup> De Munck, “The Agency of Branding,” 1055-1076.



**Figure 8.2: Pieter van Roestraten, *Still Life with Silver Tankard*, Oil Painting, England, c. 1700, Victoria and Albert Museum.**

Knowledge of regulatory marks was also demonstrated in cases of theft. As well as their reference to sponsors' marks, discussed earlier in the chapter, individuals referred to hallmarks and other marks of quality when testifying in court. This gives a unique insight into who knew about the regulatory marks on metalware, and how quality was perceived. One defendant, accused of stealing pewter plates and dishes, argued in her defence that 'she did take down a Plate, admiring its Brightness, and desiring to see if the letter X was upon it, having heard that those plates which have

that Mark are made of the best Pewter, but did not intend to take it away'.<sup>43</sup> It was in the defendant's interest to provide an alternative series of events; nevertheless, it gives a sense that consumers were able to understand and recognise regulatory marks. Consumers often referred to regulatory marks to demonstrate their knowledge, and therefore ownership, of a product. For example, a hallmark was used to identify stolen silver spoons, tongs and pots in a theft case in 1741. When asked if the objects were her property, and questioned by the prisoner in his defence that 'one thing may be like another', Mrs Griffith answered that 'it is remarkable enough, for here is the hall mark'.<sup>44</sup>

The detail of this knowledge was sometimes called into question. John Moore was convicted of forgery and deception for counterfeiting a hallmark and the stamp of the Goldsmiths' Company.<sup>45</sup> An assay master at Goldsmiths' Hall described how buckles were brought to him that were 'brass silvered over' and were stamped 'like the stamp used at Goldsmiths-hall upon silver buckles', which he argued 'would deceive any one... by candlelight'. Moore was suspected of theft when he attempted to pawn the buckles as silver, but wrongly described the hallmark as a cat, so 'the fools did not know a cat from a lion'. The quality of an object was also called into question when the regulatory marks were conspicuously absent. In a case of theft, a shopkeeper had a gold ring tested that he was offered to buy second-hand, because 'there was no hall-mark'.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, in another case of theft, a shopkeeper was accused of receiving

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<sup>43</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, September 1715, trial of unnamed defendant (t17150907-8).

<sup>44</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, October 1741, trial of Robert Ramsey (t17411014-4).

<sup>45</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, January 1776, trial of John Moore (t17760109-70).

<sup>46</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, October 1777, trial of George Edward Ditcher et. al. (t17771015-22).



stolen goods when they bought a stolen silver shoe-buckle that ‘was not standard marked silver’.<sup>47</sup> Stolen goods were also more suspicious when they had their marks ‘very artificially filed out’, damaged or removed.<sup>48</sup> It was especially important for shopkeepers, pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers to recognise potentially stolen or suspicious metalware because they could be convicted of the crime of receiving stolen goods if they negligently or intentionally bought stolen goods. Consumers who purchased silver also needed to be aware of the regulatory marks on silver and pewter so that they could be reassured it was of a guaranteed quality. Therefore, regulatory marks and marks of quality were part of public knowledge.

Regulatory marks also entered the public imagination and transcended their regulatory role when consumers began to demand and expect imitative hallmarks on metal goods that were not silver. Pewter and Sheffield plate began to display imitative marks that resembled the four parts of a hallmark, contrary to guild regulation.<sup>49</sup> For example, on a covered cup (Figure 8.3) the sponsor’s mark HT, for the producers Tudor & Leader & Co., was repeated four times to imitate the four marks of the hallmark. However, it is unlikely that this would have deceived an observant onlooker. Although they were an imitation of a hallmark, they incorporated the real name of the maker, so the producer of substandard metalware could be identified and they satisfied the primary function of the hallmark.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, October 1745, trial of Matthew Robinson and John Penn (t17451016-17).

<sup>48</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, May 1724, trial of Peter Burgess (t17240521-22).

<sup>49</sup> Imitative marks are also discussed in chapter 2.

<sup>50</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/88/14, ‘Minutes on the Sheffield Assay Petition’, 24 February 1773, f. 12.



**Figure 8.3: Covered Cup, Old Sheffield Plate, c. 1760, Sheffield Millennium Gallery, 1977.695.**

Helen Clifford argues that the desire for these imitative marks often came from the consumer, as well as the producer.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, the use of imitative hallmarks on different types of metalware indicates that the mark itself had become a sign of quality. This only worked because discussions of the perception and definition of quality had entered the public sphere.

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<sup>51</sup> Helen Clifford, "Innovation or Emulation? Silverware and its Imitations in Britain 1750-1800," *History of Technology* 23 (2001), 59-80.

## 8.4 Inspection and Consumer Knowledge

The ability of consumers to inspect metalware was intertwined with their knowledge of production and regulation. Although marks were often in highly visible locations, some marks might be on the base, or even inside a metal object, therefore an object might need to be inspected more closely in order to view them. Moreover, consumers could inspect all types of metalware, including those without marks, to assess its quality. Gary Richardson shows how medieval consumers were able to inspect objects to try and determine their quality.<sup>52</sup> This knowledge continued into the eighteenth century, when consumers were able to inspect a range of consumer goods. Textiles, for example, could be visually inspected for their colour and felt for the quality of their weave.<sup>53</sup> In many ways, metalware was more difficult to visually judge for its quality because of the complex composition of metalware, and the way in which it could be recycled and re-worked. Nevertheless, there were ways in which quality could be assessed. Metal goods could be inspected to check for excess solder on their edges, which disguised deceptive products and falsely increased its weight, and therefore its value. Metalware might also be scratched to see how soft or hard it was, which gave an indication of its intrinsic quality; or pewter could be struck to hear if it ‘resonated at a particular pitch’.<sup>54</sup>

Increasingly in the eighteenth century, consumers were called upon to judge quality rather than the burden resting with the regulator, producer or retailer. They

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<sup>52</sup> Gary Richardson, “Brand Names before the Industrial Revolution,” *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper*, No 13930 (2008).

<sup>53</sup> Helen Berry, “Polite Consumption: Shopping in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002), 387.

<sup>54</sup> Richardson, “Brand Names before the Industrial Revolution,” 1.

developed the skills to inspect and understand the materiality of metalware and the quality of individual objects and materials. The inspection of goods was facilitated by new spaces that associated a consumer's ability to assess authenticity and quality, with their taste and social status. Retail spaces, such as shops, showrooms, and auction houses, provided the opportunity to inspect goods in public or in intimate groups, which was a marker of taste and expertise.<sup>55</sup> Separate parts of the shop were opened especially for consumers to inspect goods at their leisure, and shopkeepers brought out drawers and packages of small metal goods onto the shop counter to show enquiring customers.<sup>56</sup> These skills were used as evidence in cases of stolen goods. Alongside witness testimony in the criminal courts during cases of theft, the objects themselves were often presented as evidence. As one of many examples, the prosecution in the trial of William Autenreith 'produced 2 table spoons' for the jury to inspect, as well as 'a large box full of plate' that was produced in court.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, the public were expected to possess a certain amount of material knowledge, and increasingly developed an ability to inspect and assess the quality of consumer goods.

## 8.5 Possessions

The role of consumers and their knowledge of an object and its marks, added to the relationship between subject and object and contributed to the transformation of an object from commodity to personal possession. Metalware could be personalised through the engraving of initials, monograms, and heraldic images. A bill for James

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<sup>55</sup> As shown in chapter 7. See also, Berry, "Polite Consumption," 387.

<sup>56</sup> See chapter 5.

<sup>57</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, January 1763, trial of William Autenreith (t17630114-23).

Gordon in 1770 showed that he paid William Addis, a jeweller, goldsmith and silversmith, 18d for the engraving of 3 coats of arms and 4d for the engraving of 4 crests of his motto.<sup>58</sup> Personal marks were also a clear statement of ownership, and an effective way of reuniting lost or stolen goods with their owners. In 1715, eleven pewter plates were found to have ‘the Mark of a Bear upon ‘em’, and so easily allowed the plates to be returned to ‘Mr Boldwin at the Bear-Tavern in the Strand’.<sup>59</sup> Tankards and plates from taverns were regularly stolen, and so were often pre-emptively engraved with mottos such as ‘Stop Thief’. Therefore, in their various ways, ‘owners often aspired to be co-authors of a surface scape’.<sup>60</sup>

Consumers also demonstrated an intimate material knowledge of the individual object, often because of their use of, and familiarity with, their personal possession. As shown earlier in this chapter, they possessed a knowledge of the regulatory marks on their goods. Consumers were able to identify an object, and also possessed an intimate knowledge of other marks of wear and repair. These were also referred to in order to prove ownership of an object in a case of theft. Martha Boot, a dish-washer to the defendant William Smith who was accused of stealing an assortment of pewter goods, argued that ‘I can swear to that cullender, but I do not know the mark’.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, in the case of a stolen copper boiler, its owner Charles Butler claimed that ‘I can safely take my Oath of it, with a clear Conscience; here is a particular Mark upon it; here is a Bulge in the Side, and a Flaw in the Rim; there is not

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<sup>58</sup> London Metropolitan Archive, SC/GL/TCC/ADD, Bill-Head of William Addis, 1770.

<sup>59</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, April 1715, trial of unnamed defendant (t17150427-19).

<sup>60</sup> Jonathan Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces: The Decorative Object in Early Modern China* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 260.

<sup>61</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, January 1743, trial of William Smith (t17430114-49).

one Pot in five Thousand more remarkable'.<sup>62</sup> These marks were proof of a personal connection, and demonstrated a relationship with an object few but the owner could have.<sup>63</sup>

Although statements of ownership were often made by the legal owner of a stolen object who was often the prosecutor in a case of theft, other individuals demonstrated their knowledge of a stolen object. Firstly, this was because the legal owner was not always the person who saw themselves as the rightful owner. For instance, upon marriage, a husband acquired legal ownership of his wife's household goods, whilst she might still view those objects as her personal possessions. When testifying to his ownership of stolen silver, a prosecutor 'swore to the Tankard, the Mug and three Spoons, but was not positive to the fourth, because he had some Plate with his Second Wife, and did not very well know the Marks of it'.<sup>64</sup> Secondly, more individuals were able to identify an object because the product life-cycle was not linear and an object did not stop with the final consumer. Metal goods might be bought and borrowed, and passed through the hands of servants, polishers and engravers. Ann Rose testified to her knowledge of a stolen spoon and grater that was her mistresses, and claimed that 'I believe the spoon to be my Mistress (Mrs Ellis) and I know the grater to be hers by these dents'.<sup>65</sup> In another case, the lodger of the victim, John Fosset, argued that although the owner could not testify to their ownership because

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<sup>62</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, June 1743, trial of Richard Warwick et. al. (t17430629-39).

<sup>63</sup> Barbara Benedict, "Encounters with the Object: Advertisements, Time and Literary Discourse in the Early Eighteenth-Century Thing Poem," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 40/2 (2007), 200.

<sup>64</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, January 1735, trial of Jane Heybourn (t17350116-47).

<sup>65</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, May 1732, trial of Mary Bradley (t17320525-4).

she was a Quaker, he knows it ‘to be her property, having drank out of it often, here is S.W. upon it, which I have seen before’.<sup>66</sup>

Even before a criminal trial, consumers gave an insight into their relationship with their personal possessions through their advertisements for lost and stolen goods.<sup>67</sup> To put an advertisement in a newspaper ‘cost an average 2s 6d (approaching half a London labourer’s weekly wage)’, and often advertisements also offered a reward for the return of lost or stolen goods.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, because of the expense, an owner’s efforts to be reunited with a stolen object often exceeded the financial value of the object. This difference in value was emphasised in an advertisement for a lost ‘Gold Snuff-box’ in the *Daily Journal* in 1727, where a reward was offered of ‘eight Guineas... being more than the value of Gold’.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, the perceived quality and value of an object could increase because of the emotional connection and familiarity of an individual with their personal possession.

As argued by Paula Findlen, ‘acquisition, use, exchange, inheritance, possession and value are all categories of interrogation in... [the] reconstruction of the meaning of things’.<sup>70</sup> The consumer knowledge of individual objects, and expressions of intimacy with their personal possessions, give a sense of how subject and object interact. The owners of an object, and a wider range of individuals who used or encountered metalware, were able to inspect and identify an object, its marks, and

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<sup>66</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, April 1758, trial of George Smith (t17580405-2).

<sup>67</sup> Jonathan Lamb, “The Crying of Lost Things,” *ELH* 71/4 (2004), 950.

<sup>68</sup> Mark S. Dawson, “First Impressions: Newspaper Advertisements and Early Modern English Body Imaging 1651-1750,” *Journal of British Studies* 50/2 (2011), 281.

<sup>69</sup> *Daily Journal*, 4 November 1727.

<sup>70</sup> Paula Findlen, “Foreword: Early Romans and their Things,” in Renata Ago, *Gusto for Things: A History of Objects in Seventeenth Century Rome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), xiv.

details about its materiality. This impacted upon knowledge about metalware more generally, but also perceptions of value and of quality.

## **8.6 Consumer Demand for Metalware**

Individuals from the producer and the owner of an object, to a wider range of servants, lodgers and cleaners, were invested in an object, personally, financially and emotionally. Consumers and the wider public might therefore possess knowledge about the marks on metalware, and details about the production and regulation of the trade. The remainder of this chapter explores the types of knowledge that consumers had, and the driving forces behind the consumer demand for metalware. In order to assess the quality of metalware, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century consumers also had to understand its symbolic role, including the aesthetic value, fashionability and social status of particular materials and products. Material knowledge was also acquired through proto-scientific discussions and publications, and through the circulation of recipes for cleaning and repairing metal goods. Because the burden of responsibility was increasingly upon the consumer to detect substandard or poor-quality metalware, this new material knowledge of metalware was crucial in the perception and deliberation of quality.

Metalware was present in the vast majority of households.<sup>71</sup> From inherited silver heirlooms, to Sheffield plate novelties and durable pewter tableware, different

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<sup>71</sup> Recent literature has explored the consumption of pots and pans. For example, Sara Pennell, *The Birth of the English Kitchen, 1600-1850* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 70-81; and Karin Dannehl, "Object Biographies: From Production to Consumption," in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (London: Routledge, 2009), 123-138.



values and qualities of metalware circulated in different parts of society, including the social elite, middle-classes and lower orders. Some historians suggest that the demand for gold, silver and pewter decreased because these trades faced increasing competition from the china and glass trades.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, silverware, and other metal goods, circulated amongst consumers and remained a popular target for theft, which suggests it had a sustained appeal and value.<sup>73</sup> Eighteenth-century producers sought to satisfy the increasing consumer demand for fashionability and novelty. The expansion of the metalware trade, innovation in production and technologies, and an increasingly flexible organisation of production, meant that consumers had a wider choice of products and materials. With the introduction of new luxuries and cheaper novelties, products were accessible to a wider range of people, socially and geographically.<sup>74</sup> Account books give a sense of the extent of the metalware owned and purchased by consumers. Larger households, in particular, had a range of types of metalware of different values. An inventory of the goods of Henry Compton from 1779 emphasises this range of metalware, and lists items such as a ‘silver wax candlestick’, ‘12 flatt brass candlesticks’, ‘2 pewter bed pans’, ‘French Plate’, ‘large plated candlesticks’ and ‘a large silver oval dish’.<sup>75</sup> In total, the Plate Butler’s Pantry

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<sup>72</sup> Bruno Blondé, “Conflicting Consumption Models? The Symbolic Meaning of Possessions and Consumption Amongst the Antwerp Nobility at the End of the Eighteenth Century”, in *Fashioning Old and New: Changing Consumer Patterns in Western Europe, 1650-1900*, ed. Bruno Blondé, Natacha Coquery, Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 73.

<sup>73</sup> Horrell, Humphries and Sneath, “Consumption Conundrums Unravelling,” 846.

<sup>74</sup> Maxine Berg, “New Commodities, Luxuries and their Consumers in Eighteenth Century England,” in *Consumers and Luxury*, ed. Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 65.

<sup>75</sup> Hampshire County Archives, 12M60/25, ‘Inventory of all Household Furniture, Plate, Linen and China of Henry Compton’, 1779.

was valued at £784 8s 7d, in contrast to £109 6s 7d of china, £101 5s 5d of linen and £22 10s 11d of glass.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, metalware, and especially silver which was used as a form of value storing, was a central and valuable part of the household economy. Moreover, even when households could afford more valuable types of metalware, they also contained a range of other products and materials.

Metalware was unusual, in that the vast majority of metalware was sold to both men and women. In trade cards, advertisements, inventories or auction catalogues, few goods were retailed separately or defined by gender. The main exception appears to be with watch chains, where women's and men's watch chains were regularly specified.<sup>77</sup> The price and sign value of metalware often determined the target audience for a consumer good and limited its consumption to a particular social class.<sup>78</sup> As this thesis has shown, in the eighteenth century, a wider range of consumers could access metalware. Not least, because they could purchase their goods by correspondence with producers and retailers, so had greater access to new products from the expanding regional manufacturing towns. Mrs Woodward, from Bristol, wrote to a close acquaintance in 1771 to inform him that she had 'taken the liberty of sending [him]... a specimen of the Sheffield Manufacture in an Ink Stand', she added

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> The National Archives, C105/5, Chancery Masters' Exhibits, Braithwaite v Taylor, 'Accounts of Administrator of Martha Braithwaite and Inventories', 1746.

<sup>78</sup> Cissie Fairchild, "The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods in Eighteenth Century Paris," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1994), 230.

that ‘I think it neat, & though not worthy of your acceptance as a present, hope you will receive it as a token of that esteem’.<sup>79</sup>

### **8.7 Aesthetic Value, Fashion, and Taste**

Increasingly, product quality was associated with the aesthetic value of products, their appearance, design and novelty.<sup>80</sup> Adam Smith referred to five aspects of an object that especially appealed to consumers in the eighteenth century: ‘colour, form, variety or rarity and imitation’, which all point to the appearance of an object.<sup>81</sup> Consumers were the deliberators of fashionability and taste, and so producers sought to gain their approval by appealing to these new qualities. The marketing of metalware, especially of new products and materials, needed to reassure the consumer of their material and symbolic quality and so emphasised their fashionability and taste.<sup>82</sup> The design of an object was therefore intertwined with the public perception of quality metalware, and

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<sup>79</sup> Hampshire County Archives, 4M52/184, ‘Letter to Daniel Dumaresq from Mrs Woodward Widow of the Bishop of Cloyne from Bristol, Sending Ink Stand 'of the Sheffield' Manufacture’, 3 November 1770.

<sup>80</sup> Bettoni, “Usefulness, Ornamental Function and Novelty,” 172; and Ariane Fennetaux, “Toying with Novelty: Toys, Consumption and Novelty in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” in *Fashioning Old and New: Changing Consumer Patterns in Western Europe, 1650-1900*, ed. Bruno Blondé, Natacha Coquery, Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 22.

<sup>81</sup> Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, “Introduction,” in *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe 1650-1850*, ed. Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 8

<sup>82</sup> See chapter 5.

its social status; the physical use and narrative description of objects helped to define the objects themselves.<sup>83</sup>

Consumers had a degree of influence in the design and production of metalware. When they purchased metal goods directly from the producer, they gave specific information about their requested design and pattern number. An order in 1769, requested ‘the new pattn of plated candle’ and referred to specific pattern numbers and specifications such as ‘2 pair of silver candl 10005 with the flowers left white. The silver candlesticks to have the tower mark upon them’.<sup>84</sup> Customers discussed the best styles with producers, but did not always have a particular design or type of metalware in mind. Nevertheless, the process involved the exchange of knowledge about product quality, especially about the aesthetic qualities of different types of metalware. In particular, consumers regularly emphasised that their orders might be new, curious and fashionable. S. Darwin wrote to Boulton requesting a ‘tea-urn, silver’d both within & without of five or six guineas value’, but added that ‘if you have a handsome one ready made it will be better, as he wishes it to go soon’.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, Mr Johnson commissioned ‘two pair of the newest fashion plated candlesticks’.<sup>86</sup> The agent he ordered through explained that ‘Mr Johnson the Gentleman they are for, is very curious, & desires they may be neatly executed, and to have his & Mrs Johnsons arms on the candlesticks’. A retailer similarly ordered ‘8

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<sup>83</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1984), 277.

<sup>84</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/18/25, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1769, ‘Bill of items for Messrs D’Olier’, 8 September 1769.

<sup>85</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/23/254. ‘Letter S. Darwin to Matthew Boulton’, 10 December 1772.

<sup>86</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/18/49, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1769, ‘Mr Galton to Matthew Boulton’, 17 November 1769.

pair of the largest & the most showy patterns... & six doz pair of pinchbeck metal shoe buckls neat light open work patterns, mens & womens sizes, let 'em be of the newest make', adding that 'if you have anything quite new & clever you may send an article or two by way of sample'.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, products were ordered in varying levels of detail, but with an emphasis upon fashionability, newness and novelty.

Producers were able to provide consumers with detailed advice, and disseminated information about new fashions and innovations. Boulton and Fothergill advised John Whitehurst what type of metal he should order his plate to be produced with. They wrote in their correspondence that 'if the star or hour plate was to be made white I think it wd look much whiter and cleaner being made of plated silver than if it was only silver'.<sup>88</sup> On another occasion, Boulton wrote to Mr Kentish that 'I should think if the case was made of Brass (as it is to be coperd) & the rims of silver it would look quite as well & would be executed full as cheaper as if made of steel, but if you would wish to have it all made of polish'd steel & not to be coverd we could make it very beautiful'.<sup>89</sup> Producers therefore drew upon consumer concerns about the aesthetic qualities of particular products, and marketed new designs based upon consumer expectations of novelty, fashionability and taste.

The durability of metalware was a particular concern of producers and consumers alike. Especially with plated objects, consumers and producers who subcontracted work had to decide on the strength of the plated coating: the stronger

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<sup>87</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/18/53, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1769, 'Letter E. Hallett (Bath) to Messrs Boulton & Fothergill', 27 November 1769.

<sup>88</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to John Whitehurst'.

<sup>89</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/1/14, Letter Book 1766-8, 'Letter Matthew Boulton to Mr Kentish', 12 August 1767.

the plate the more durable the object, but this made it more expensive and affected its aesthetic quality by making the design less delicate. Durability was often of more importance because of the distance finished products had to travel to get to the consumer. Boulton complained about an order of subcontracted handles:

... with the tea kitchen handles which are so badly (say thinly) plated that we are obliged to return them to have them plated stronger - as they are to go to tea kitchens that will wear a long time it is necessary that they should be plated a deal stronger then they normally do their current artickles.<sup>90</sup>

As argued in chapter 6, the durability of products was a greater concern when the product had a high use-value, which was the case with Boulton's order of plated handles. Therefore, the material composition and quality of an object was negotiated between producer and consumer, based on the aesthetic design of a product, and the requirements for its use and durability.

Plays and public debates about the morality of consumption mocked the frivolity of consumer preferences. They commented upon the short life-cycle of products, both in terms of their increasingly poor durability and the speed with which new fashions became outdated and unpopular. Robert Dodsley's play *The Toy-Shop* satirised the profits that shopkeepers could make from the consumer demand for novelties and new fashions. Dodsley's protagonist, a shopkeeper, explained to the audience that 'thanks to the whimsical extravagance and folly of mankind! I believe,

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<sup>90</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to William Matthews', 13 July 1771.

from these childish toys, and gilded baubles, I shall pick up a comfortable maintenance. For, really, as it is a trifling age, so nothing but trifles are valued in it'.<sup>91</sup> The increasing importance of the entertainment and experience of customers caused a 'shift from possession to performance', which influenced the perceived quality of metalware.<sup>92</sup> Traditionally, silver was a reliable and consistent way to store value. Although its price fluctuated, especially the cost of fashioning, it was guaranteed to have an intrinsic value and could be melted down into legal coinage. The new emphasis on novelty meant that many consumer goods and designs lost their value when they became outdated, particularly those produced in plated silver or other new materials. Patterns had to be regularly updated to ensure their popularity, and sold before the end of the fashionable season. Boulton claimed that goods had to be sold quickly, or 'I am certain these old patterns will never sell after that is over, for I find the shops are now full of them'.<sup>93</sup>

Nevertheless, debates about the rise of aesthetic quality and fashionability reiterated the importance of product quality and use-value. Later in Dodsley's play *The Toy-Shop*, the shopkeeper tried to sell a pair of spectacles purely based on their novelty and appearance. However, the customer retorted 'do you think I buy spectacles as your fine gentlemen buy books? If I wanted a pair of spectacles only to look at, I would have them fine ones; but as I want them to look with, do you see, I'll have them good ones'.<sup>94</sup> The play argued that, especially with objects with a practical purpose, aesthetic quality should not be prioritised over its use-value and the quality of the

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<sup>91</sup> Robert Dodsley, *The Toy-Shop* (London: W. Oxlade, 1775), 9-10.

<sup>92</sup> Fennetaux, "Toying with Novelty," 24.

<sup>93</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/20/3, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1771, 'Letter M. Hobster to Matthew Boulton', 31 March 1771.

<sup>94</sup> Dodsley, *The Toy-Shop*, 19.

design. Nevertheless, just as design and taste resided in the public consciousness, so too did utility, which responded to particular consumer priorities and desires that ‘seemed to rest both in the object and in the mind’.<sup>95</sup>

## 8.8 Social Value

Metalware was also assigned meaning through its symbolic and social value. Perceptions of quality were socially and culturally constructed, and so were intertwined with ideas about the status and popularity of particular products and materials. Literature across disciplines has investigated how personal possessions were able to help create an individual identity, and ‘extend the self, and connect the self with others’.<sup>96</sup> This was the case with different identities, whether familial, national, religious, political, social or economic.<sup>97</sup> The symbolic and social value of an object therefore blurred the boundary between subject and object. Just as quality, fashion and status could be communicated by an object about its owner, it could also be reflected onto the object by the quality and status of its owner.<sup>98</sup>

As new products and materials entered the market in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, consumers had to construct new social meanings. Before the 1720s, the social status of particular products had been dictated by sumptuary laws,

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<sup>95</sup> Bianchi, *The Active Consumer*, 5.

<sup>96</sup> Marcia Pointon, *Strategies for Showing: Women, Possession, and Representation in English Visual Culture 1665-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 7; and Benedict, “Encounters with the Object,” 200.

<sup>97</sup> Arthur Asa Berger, *Reading Matter: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Material Culture* (London: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 74.

<sup>98</sup> Berg and Clifford, “Introduction,” 9.



which attempted to control the hierarchy of goods and people.<sup>99</sup> Since their disappearance, and with the influence of new luxuries, materials gained new meanings and new consumers. Although some types of metalware, such as silver, remained exclusive and expensive, on the whole, more social groups were able to access metal goods in a variety of materials and prices. Malachy Postlethwayt, who published extensively on trade and commerce in the eighteenth century, speculated about what drove consumer demand, and argued that ‘the mechanic’s wife will not buy a damask of fifteen shillings a yard; but will have one of eight or nine; she does not trouble herself much about the quality of the silk; but is satisfied with making as fine a shew as a person of higher rank or fortune’.<sup>100</sup> This attempt to capitalise on the symbolic value of goods was about more than possessing goods at a low price. Consumers sought to elevate themselves socially, and the social status of particular products improved the perceived quality of a product, and consequently of its owner.<sup>101</sup> In recent scholarship, social emulation has been seen as insufficient in explaining consumer behaviour, especially of the middling sort.<sup>102</sup> Although spending habits were no longer legally restricted by sumptuary laws, social pressures meant that in the eighteenth century there were still exclusive ‘meaning-laden objects that could only be read by those who possessed a knowledge of the object-code’.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Fairchild, “The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods,” 230.

<sup>100</sup> Malachy Postlethwayt, *Britain’s Commercial Interest Explained and Improved* (Dublin, 1767), 281.

<sup>101</sup> Horrell, Humphries and Sneath, “Consumption Conundrums Unravelled,” 833.

<sup>102</sup> Berry, “Polite Consumption,” 387; and Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660-1760* (London: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>103</sup> Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches and the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 20.

The social and physical perception of metalware came hand in hand. For example, patina, or the visible ageing of metalware that turned copper green and silver a blueish-grey, was highly fashionable because it signalled inherited wealth and quality.<sup>104</sup> Particularly popular in the sixteenth century, patina was a sign of elite social status and the long-term ownership of metalware. It represented the traditional market for 'old' metalware, but overlapped and co-existed with the desire for fashionability and new luxuries in the eighteenth century.<sup>105</sup> Therefore, patina became fashionable and maintained its value in the eighteenth century. This fashionable aesthetic effect gained its meaning from a combination of its intrinsic value, aesthetic qualities and social symbolism. The conspicuous regulatory marks of quality on metalware also served a social purpose. As seen earlier in this chapter (Figure 8.2), hallmarks were often highly visible and were displayed on silver products. They acted as a statement of quality, value and authenticity, and reflected upon the status of its owner and the guild who were responsible for the guarantee of quality.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, the consumer demand for imitative hallmarks (Figure 8.3) shows the potential for the statement of the value and quality of metalware, beyond its regulatory control. The material, symbolic and social properties of consumer goods and personal possessions were intertwined.

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<sup>104</sup> McCracken, *Culture and Consumption*, 31-43; and Helen Clifford, "The Veneer of Age: Valuing the Patina of Silver in Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture*, 239-255.

<sup>105</sup> Helen Clifford challenges the division between 'old' and 'new' put forward in McCracken's discussion of patina. Clifford, "The Veneer of Age," 244.

<sup>106</sup> De Munck, "The Agency of Branding," 1055-1076.

## 8.9 Scientific and Material Knowledge

Knowledge of the material qualities of metalware also came from an increasing public interest in proto-scientific thought and investigation. Influential producers were involved in intellectual networks, and so were able to benefit from the circulation of scientific and philosophical knowledge. Matthew Boulton, for example, was a member of the Lunar Society and debated philosophy, the arts and sciences with influential individuals beyond the metalware trade. The Lunar Society was formed of a diverse group of innovators and manufacturers including Matthew Boulton, James Watt, Josiah Wedgwood, Erasmus Darwin and Joseph Priestly.<sup>107</sup> As such, it encouraged collaboration and the circulation of knowledge between different trades and areas of society. Boulton was also involved in the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, and wrote a letter in support of Mr Charles Taylor who was applying to become secretary of the society, motivated by ‘the interest I feel in the prosperity of the society instituted for the encouragement of the arts, manufacture & commerce’.<sup>108</sup> Manufacturing and scientific progress was intertwined; the skill of craftsmanship, particularly within the metalware trades, contributed to the development of modern science, as ‘the use of precision instruments - the enclosed balance in assaying, for example - and the practices of trying, testing, and experimenting in smelting and sculpting, were very much like the empirical practices that became enshrined as part

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<sup>107</sup> Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men: The Friends who made the Future, 1730-1810* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), xiv.

<sup>108</sup> British Library, Add MS 60484 f.14. ‘Society for the Encouragement of the Arts: Matthew Boulton, Engineer: Address to the Society’, 1800.

of the scientific method'.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, the circulation of knowledge between the metalware trade, and other trades within manufacturing, the arts and sciences, encouraged innovation and practical and moral progress.

This interest in scientific knowledge also spread to consumers and the wider public, and had the potential to change the consumer perception, understanding, and experience of metalware. Consumers increasingly sought to better understand their personal possessions and the materials they were buying. This was connected to the changes in the regulation of the trade that placed a greater responsibility for quality deliberation on the consumer, which meant that consumers needed to possess this knowledge to ensure they purchased quality metalware.<sup>110</sup> Consumers also sought out new knowledge because of their intellectual curiosity and interest in production and technology. Publications targeted this thirst for new knowledge. In his *Touch Stone for Gold and Silver Wares*, William Badcock, a goldsmith, wrote to 'buyers of large plate, or small works' about the range of metalware. He discussed how all metals were formed from the four elements, which 'generated a seed by the will of God' that settled in the earth and:

Where the Earth is subtil, pure, and humid... it becomes GOLD; and  
where it is hot and sometimes impure, it becomes SILVER; but if that

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<sup>109</sup> Pamela H. Smith, "Making and Knowing: Craft as Natural Philosophy," in *Ways of Making and Knowing: The Material Culture of Empirical Knowledge*, ed. Pamela H. Smith, Amy R. W. Meyers and Harold J. Cook (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 18; and Pamela H. Smith, "Vermilion, Mercury, Blood, and Lizards: Matter and Meaning in Metalworking," in *Expertise in Early Modern Europe: Between Market and Laboratory*, ed. Ursula Klein and E.C. Spary (London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 31.

<sup>110</sup> As argued in chapter 2.

fatness comes to impure places, which are cold, it is made LEAD; and if that place be pure and mixed with Sulphur, it becomes COPPER: for by how much the more pure and warm the place is, so much the more excellent doth it make the metals.<sup>111</sup>

This suggests that there was a widespread awareness of the way in which metals were not found in their pure form, but settled with other elements in the earth. This scientific understanding of geology contributed to the perceived hierarchy of quality metalware and a discussion about their purity or impurity, which impacted on their ‘excellence’, where gold and silver had a higher value than lead and copper.

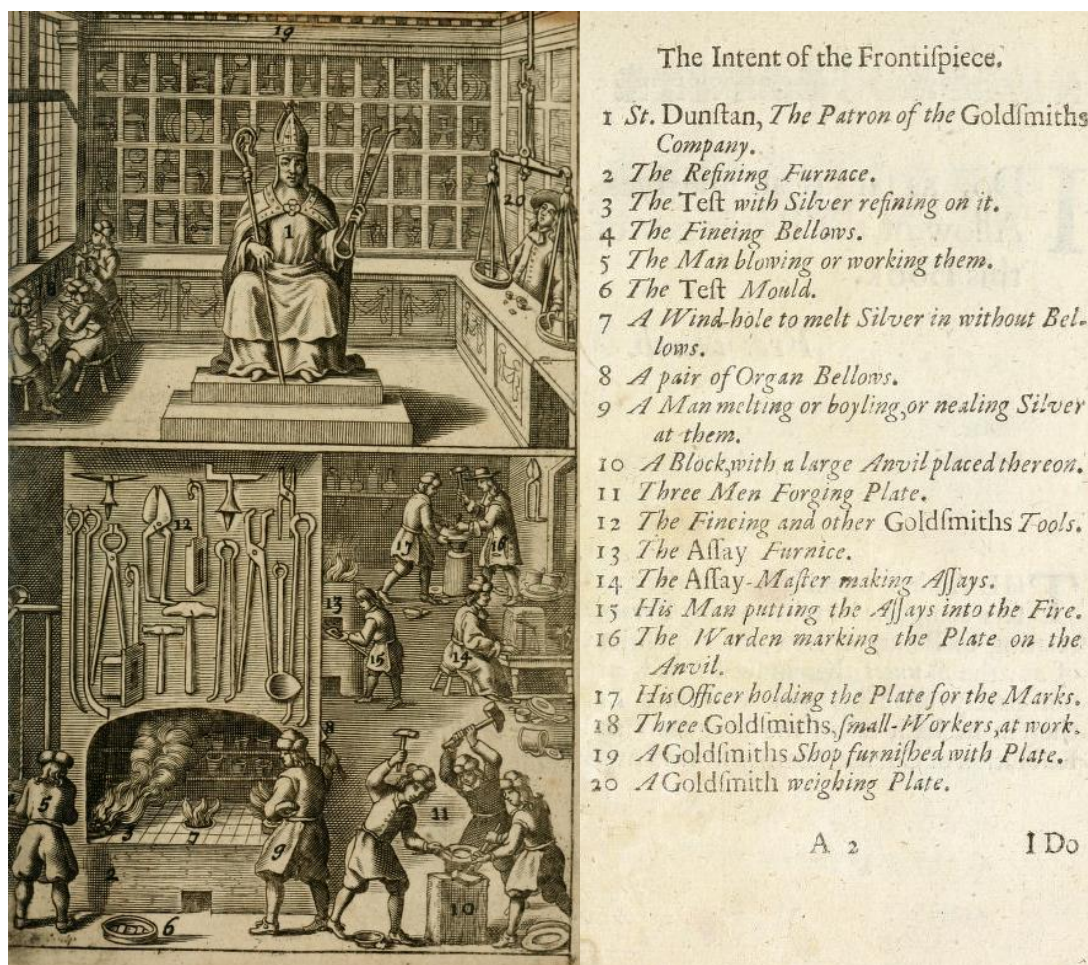
Consumers had new access to scientific knowledge that was previously codified in technical writings and drawing, or was tacit and oral.<sup>112</sup> For example, the frontispiece to Badcock’s publication *A New Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares* (Figure 8.4) provided a labelled representation of a workshop, assay room and shop space. The publication was specifically targeted at the consumer, and conveys detailed visual and descriptive knowledge about the regulation of the gold and silver trades. As suggested by the frontispiece, this brought together information about regulation, production and retailing. Within the book, Badcock describes different processes within the production of metalware, from the placing of the copels of silver into the fire, to the hammering and weighing of the final product.<sup>113</sup> It also describes the assay process, and the way in which a producer or consumer can send an object to an Assay Office for a ‘true report of the value thereof in writing’.

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<sup>111</sup> William Badcock, *A New Touch-stone for Gold and Silver Wares* (London: Printed and Sold by W. Freeman, 1708), 5.

<sup>112</sup> Mokyr, *The Gifts of Athena*, 56.

<sup>113</sup> Badcock, *A New Touch-stone for Gold and Silver Wares*, 30.



**Figure 8.4: William Badcock, *A New Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver Wares* (London: Printed and Sold by W. Freeman, 1708), Frontispiece.**

This added to the public knowledge of regulation, and suggests there was the circulation of detailed information regarding the technological processes of producing and assaying metalware. In particular, it highlights the increasing role consumers played in the assessing of quality metalware, and the new knowledge they developed to be able to do that. This was not just about their intellectual desire, but it was good business sense for consumers who did not want to be deceived when investing in quality metalware.

Another publication, *A New Method of Assaying or Trying GOLD and SILVER*, similarly informed consumers and its wider readership about the assay

process. A summary of the text was published in *The Monthly Miscellany* for September 1774, which was a collection of ‘the most valuable of those essays, letters and other pieces, which are to be met with in various magazines and reviews’.<sup>114</sup> The summary of *A New Method of Assaying or Trying GOLD and SILVER* was therefore published alongside a variety of poems and texts covering a vast range of topics from social etiquette to horticultural advice.<sup>115</sup> This suggests that it targeted a wide readership geographically and socially, which was also reflected by its price at 6d for the individual edition or 4s 6d for a volume. The essay itself narrates the author Francis Spilsbury’s attempts to discover a new method for trying gold or silver, which he describes as ‘a great service to the public’.<sup>116</sup> It describes in detail the process of assaying by measuring the weight of a piece of gold or silver and inspecting its colour.

The precise audience for Spilsbury’s text is unclear. Unlike Badcock’s *Touch-Stone for Gold and Silver*, the *New Method of Assaying or Trying GOLD and SILVER* never explicitly states that it is written as a guide for the consumer to undertake the assaying of metalware themselves. Spilsbury’s process did largely use household tools and an ordinary fire, and so it may have been designed for the consumer to be able to test the quality of their metalware themselves. However, Spilsbury, describes himself as a ‘Chymist’, and so had more experience than an ordinary consumer. Therefore, it is more likely that Spilsbury’s text was intended as a statement of invention, rather than a guide for the public to understand the assay process. The publication may have instead aimed to catch the attention of the Goldsmiths’ Company and other producers, as well as the consumer. Other members of the public were also experimenting with

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<sup>114</sup> *Derby Mercury*, 9 September 1774.

<sup>115</sup> Francis Spilsbury, “A New Method of Assaying or Trying GOLD and SILVER, by a Short Process, in a Few Minutes,” in *Monthly Miscellany* (London, 1774).

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

metalware. Anthony van Leuwenhoek published his ‘observations on staining the fingers with a solution of silver in Aqua Fortis’ in 1704.<sup>117</sup> Van Leuwenhoek wrote that during his experiments, his fingers turned black, so he ‘resolv’d to cut off some thin scales of the skin, and to see if I could get any silver out of it, so as to be able to perceive that it was silver’.

Although this proto-scientific experimentation might not have been widespread, the discussions about their results and experiences were public. Consumers were increasingly exposed to information about different types of metalware, the regulation of the trade and the assay process. This knowledge would have contributed to the consumer understanding of quality, and added to their ability to inspect and determine the quality of their possessions.

## **8.10 Re-fashioning and Repair**

Consumers also possessed a material knowledge of metalware because of the need to clean, maintain and repair their metal goods. Although contemporary commentators satirised the lack of durability and the decreasing life-span of objects, as discussed earlier in the chapter, it was not the case that goods were quickly discarded and replaced, and consumers invested in the quality, durability and appearance of their possessions. Consumer goods passed through the hands of producers, cleaners and engravers, who had the tools, the expertise and the responsibility to clean and maintain metalware. This was often a service that producers and retailers offered at the point of

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<sup>117</sup> Anthony van Leuwenhoek, “Observations on Staining the Fingers with a Solution of Silver in Aqua Fortis, etc. in a Letter from MR Anthony Van Leuwenhoek,” *JSTOR Philosophical Transactions 1683-1775*, 24 (1704).



sale, and so consumers could return to the shop on a regular basis to maintain their metalware.<sup>118</sup> Some shops offered to exchange old for new, for example Stone and Company, which ‘did not offer mending services, or re-tinning, as others invariably did’, but ‘offered to replace with new’.<sup>119</sup> However, this was the exception rather than the rule, and bill-heads and receipts show the frequency with which goods were repaired and maintained. On 26 September 1785, Knap was paid 3s for Tinning and mending a large tea kettle, and 6d for Tinning a small kettle;<sup>120</sup> Waters was paid 1s on 29 December 1787 for mending a kitchen poker’;<sup>121</sup> and William Addis was paid for ‘polishing & doing up as new... plate’.<sup>122</sup> Watches required more regular upkeep, and one customer returned twice a year to Addis to have their gold watch cleaned and mended, which cost 3s 6d each time.<sup>123</sup> The cost of repair varied hugely, but could be as little as 4d for mending a firepan, and so was an option for a range of people and products.<sup>124</sup>

Homeowners or servants could also use recipes to clean their objects themselves. Producers and retailers were able to pass on knowledge to the consumer

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<sup>118</sup> Helen Clifford, “A Commerce with Things: The Value of Precious Metalwork in Early Modern England,” in *Consumers and Luxury*, 152-153; and Sara Pennell, “Material Culture in Seventeenth Century Britain: The Matter of Domestic Consumption,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, 78.

<sup>119</sup> Nancy Cox and Karin Dannehl, *Perceptions of Retailing in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 86.

<sup>120</sup> Hampshire County Archives, 1M44/74, ‘Household, Personal and Estate Account Book of 7th Countess of Banbury’, 1780-93, f. 73.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 77.

<sup>122</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, SC/GL/TCC/ADD, Trade Card of William Addis, 1770.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> Hampshire County Archives, 44M69/E8/2/29, ‘Blacksmiths/ Metal Working Accounts of Thomas Rampton for Thomas Jervoise’, 1734-5.

about how to care for their metal goods. Some new materials, products and designs required more care than others. Boulton explained to one customer that:

It is almost impossible to make something of silver very elegant unless there is a contract of colours, vizt bright burnishes parts constructed with a beautifull white dead matt, but as such matt is difficult to be clean'd, so people in general have chosen their silver ornaments pollish'd in every parte. Now as I could wish to see every elegance introduced into the plate manufacture, therefore shall endeavour to obviate that common objection against dead work in silver, by furnishing every person with the apparatus, & the knowledge of cleaning the dead parts as well as the bright polished. When I have prepared the materials & printed the necessary directions (which will be before your lordships cands want cleaning) I will send them for the use of your Lordships silver scullery.<sup>125</sup>

Another of Boulton's customers, Miss Witts wrote to him to request the recipe or mixture for 'a cement' that Boulton's servant had promised would repair broken marble candlesticks that had been damaged on the carriage journey from the warehouse.<sup>126</sup> The transport of goods from producer to consumer often caused the breaking, dirtying or damaging of ordered goods. Therefore, producers had to frequently reassure the consumer the quality of their products could be revived.

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<sup>125</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to the Earl of Shelbourne', 7 January 1771.

<sup>126</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/12/23/123, 'Letter Apphia Witts to Boulton & Fothergill', 11 November 1768, ff. 1-2.

Boulton wrote to another customer who complained of buttons that appeared tarnished after their delivery, that ‘it is possible that they did tarnish upon the road... however if they are not quite tarnished you may give ‘em their primitive colour, by rubbing em well with a piece of soft leather’.<sup>127</sup>

Knowledge about the cleaning and repair of metalware circulated beyond producers, and cleaners and servants were required to use this knowledge to maintain metalware. This builds upon recent literature which has also explored how textiles were cleaned and repaired.<sup>128</sup> For example, a ‘charewoman’ was ‘hired by the hall of one of the city-companies to scour their Pewter’.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, servants might be directed to clean the plate of their household. A recipe for ‘cleaning chased plate when tarnished’ was hand-written inside the cover of an account book. This directed the reader to:

Make use of hot soap suds & with a softish brush rub the chased parts of your plate which will require more than the plain parts, then wipe all the wet you can off with a soft linen cloth then dry it well before the fire and let it damp it be quite dry before you put it away is if put away the least damp, it will tarnish again immediately. N.B... When quite

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<sup>127</sup> Birmingham City Archives, MS 3782/21/1, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1773, ‘Letter to John Aston’, 27 March 1773.

<sup>128</sup> Pennell “Material Culture in Seventeenth Century ‘Britain’,” 78; and Amanda Vickery, “Women and the World of Goods: A Lancashire Consumer and her Possessions, 1751-81,” in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1994), 282.

<sup>129</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, December 1677, trial of unnamed defendant (t16771212-4).

dry, if you rub the plain parts with a very clean soft leather, it will give it a good polish.<sup>130</sup>

This recipe suggests that different types of designs and materials, in this case chased plate, had unique material properties and required different knowledge to effectively clean them. Consumers needed to possess this knowledge or maintain a relationship with the producer, to maintain a product's aesthetic quality, as well as its use, durability and material quality.

Metalware could also be re-worked or refashioned if it became unfashionable, or needed replacing entirely when it could no longer be cleaned or repaired. This made metalware unique, because only metalware could be melted down so that the raw material could be re-used. Consumers were aware of this option, and made enquiries about the cost of re-working an object they already had rather than purchasing a new one. For example, in their enquiries for a new church bell, the Dean and Chapter of a church in Hampshire were informed by Robert Wells that a new treble bell would cost '£6 per hundred' based upon its weight, in contrast to the '28s per hundred' it would cost to cast it using the old bell metal.<sup>131</sup>

Old designs could also be added to and re-fashioned, when they had become unfashionable. New decorations could be added to metalware, for example by adding engravings or applying decoration. A clear example of this can be seen with a candlestick and snuffer (Figure 8.5), that was made in sterling silver by the firm Fenton, Creswick and Watson in 1772. The decoration on the candlestick tells a story

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<sup>130</sup> Hampshire County Archives, 1M44/74, 'Household, Personal and Estate Account Book of 7th Countess of Banbury', 1780-93.

<sup>131</sup> Hampshire County Archives, DC/E4/2/8, 'Letter from Rob[er]t Wells at Aldbourne to the Dean and Chapter with Costed Proposal for Casting a Treble Bell', 22 December 1771.

about the evolution and after-life of its design. It was initially produced in 1772, when it was hallmarked with the London hallmarks and the sponsor's mark MF RC. However, its chasing decoration was applied later, which can be seen by the way in which it conspicuously avoids covering the hallmark. This emphasises the way in which the intrinsic value of silver remained constant, with the need to keep its regulatory marks. However, the aesthetic value and fashionability of the object could change and evolve. There were also later engravings with a message 'RMC from JMC' on the base, the initials RMC on the snuffer and the inscription Revelation XXII.5 on the handle.



**Figure 8.5: Candlestick and Snuffer, Sterling Silver, Fenton, Creswick and Watson, 1772, Sheffield Assay Office.**

Although the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw an increasing variety of new products and materials, the boundary between the new and the old was not always clear. It did not automatically result in the disregard of old objects, which could be renewed by being cleaned, re-plated, or re-fashioned. The need for consumers to clean and repair their metalware gives a unique insight into the material knowledge that they possessed, and the way in which that knowledge circulated between producers, retailers and consumers.

## **Conclusion**

The role of consumers as deliberators of quality, and their ability to inspect and interpret metal goods, influenced their perception of quality. The owners of objects were more likely to have an intimate knowledge of their personal possessions, and could recall more details about their history and their marks. However, as this chapter has shown, more people than the owner were invested in an object, and engaged with it throughout its life-cycle. These individuals and groups of people drew upon different forms of knowledge, such as the physical and material knowledge of different types of products and materials; but also knowledge of the subjective and symbolic role of metalware, especially with regards to taste, fashionability and social value. In the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, consumers had to obtain new knowledge as they were increasingly given the burden of quality control, and so were required to inspect goods and judge quality, authenticity and fashionability. The wider context of proto-scientific investigation, and the development of new ways to gather knowledge such as trade directories and consumer guides to the assay process, made it easier for information to circulate between producer and consumer. This gives an insight into

how the wider public interacted with their metal goods, and how the knowledge of metalware, including its production and regulation, spread into the public consciousness and popular culture.

## Conclusion

By the end of the eighteenth century, Birmingham was known nationally and internationally as ‘the Toyshop of Europe’.<sup>1</sup> Important manufacturers of the period such as Matthew Boulton, found fame and fortune for their production of metalware.<sup>2</sup> This thesis has explored the origins of Birmingham’s expansion and the development of its reputation as the centre of production of quality metalware. In doing so, it has considered the production, retail and consumption of a range of metalware in England, ranging from luxury materials such as gold and silver, cheaper metals including pewter and brass, and new types of metalware that were developed from the late-seventeenth century, notably Sheffield plate and ormolu. By bringing together the literature that has often looked at these individual metals separately, this thesis has shown how new products and materials affected the hierarchy of quality metalware. It has argued that the expansion of the trade in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries led to a re-deliberation of quality, in which novelty, variety and innovation became increasingly important. This occurred because of the changing tangible qualities of metalware (including new materials, technologies and designs), as well as changing intangible qualities (such as reputation).

There was an increasing movement of people, products and processes between the expanding regional manufacturing towns of Birmingham and Sheffield, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Francesca Carnevali, “Golden Opportunities: Jewelry Making in Birmingham between Mass Production and Speciality,” *Enterprise and Society* 4/2 (2003), 275.

<sup>2</sup> In 1783, 94 manufacturers in Birmingham had greater than £5,000, 80 had more than £10,000 and 17 manufacturers had in excess of £20,000. Maxine Berg, “Commerce and Creativity in Eighteenth-Century Birmingham,” in *Markets and Manufacture in Early Industrial Europe*, ed. Maxine Berg (London: Routledge, 1991), 189.



traditional centre of the production of metalware in London. New technologies meant that metalware could be produced at a higher quality and a lower price, and an innovative organisation of production allowed manufacturers to produce a wider variety of products in different designs and materials. These changes, which often originated from the innovative producers in Birmingham and Sheffield, impacted on the trade as a whole. This led to a re-configuration of the spaces of production, when Birmingham and Sheffield's reputation surpassed that of London. More importantly, it influenced the wider perception of quality, as consumers demanded greater variety, new products and quality from producers across the country. It is only by looking at the relationship between these areas that it is possible to understand the changes in the production and perception of metalware in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By doing so, this thesis contributes to recent research by Bert De Munck and Philippe Minard that shows the concept of quality to be a convention, that was debated and deliberated in different historical contexts.<sup>3</sup> It provides a better understanding of the perception of quality, and how and why it was re-deliberated in the late-seventeenth- and eighteenth-century expansion of the trade.

Quality was imposed by institutions such as the guilds and state who regulated the trade, but it was also influenced by producers, retailers, consumers and the wider public. By following the life-cycle of metalware, from its regulation, to production,

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<sup>3</sup> Bert De Munck, "Guilds, Product Quality and Intrinsic Value: Towards a History of Conventions?" *Historical Social Research* 36/4 (2011): 103-124; Philippe Minard, "Micro-Economics and Social Construction of the Market: Disputes Among the London Leather Trades in the Eighteenth-Century," *Historical Social Research* 36/4 (2011), 150-168; and Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna, "Locating and Dislocating Value: A Pragmatic Approach to Early Modern and Nineteenth-Century Economic Practices," in *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture, 1500-1900*, ed. Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 1-31.

retail and consumption, this thesis has analysed the ways in which these different stages influenced the deliberation of quality. This thesis challenges the binary nature of the shift from a regulated quality to a deliberated quality, put forward by Minard.<sup>4</sup> Within the metalware trades, regulation remained crucial in the deliberation of quality for two reasons. Firstly, because of the materiality of metalware: the material composition of metalware was complex because each type of metal could not be worked in its pure state and so was a combination of different materials, which was difficult to determine just by viewing an object. It was therefore necessary for the consumer to trust in the intrinsic quality of an object, especially with silver because it had to be of the legal standard in case it was melted-down and used as coinage. Secondly, regulators such as the guilds continued to influence the deliberation of quality because they were flexible institutions. Although they found it increasingly difficult to monitor the quality of metalware across the expanding places of production, they adapted the ways in which they enforced their regulations by relying upon the consumer to report substandard ware.

At times, these different agents had competing interests. For instance, the London producers who were firmly in charge of the guild structure of the trade and the emerging Birmingham and Sheffield producers competed to control the networks of power and trust, respectability and good-quality metalware, as demonstrated prior to the opening of new Assay Offices in Birmingham and Sheffield in 1773. Moreover, retailers and producer-retailers strove to be known as the gatekeepers of fashionability and guarantors of quality. Nevertheless, there were many ways in which different stages of the life-cycle worked together to influence the deliberation of quality and the perception of metalware. Not least, the way in which producers and retailers appealed

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<sup>4</sup> Minard, "Micro-Economics and Social Construction of the Market," 150.

to the consumer demand for novelty with their development of new products and materials, the design of their retail spaces, and the presentation of metalware in wrappers, draws and under curtains.

This thesis has emphasised the connections and communication between the regulation, production, retail and consumption of the metalware trade. Although it has followed the life-cycle of metalware, it has demonstrated from the beginning that the life-cycle of objects was not linear. Metalware often passed through the hands of many workers, retailers and consumers, and producers maintained a relationship with their goods even once they had been sold when they were asked to repair, refashion or re-sell metalware. By analysing a range of sources including documentary evidence, visual sources and artefacts, this thesis illuminates the ways in which quality was deliberated. It shows how regulators, producers and retailers used the rise of new print cultures, such as the circulation of newspapers, pattern books and trade cards, to better communicate with the consumer. The language, imagery and the design of these sources helped to construct the perception of metalware and influence the deliberation of quality. An analysis of these sources shows the ways in which they able to enhance the increasing variety and novelty of metalware, and circulate information about changes in the regulation of the trade, new technologies, and the new places associated with the production and retail of metalware.

This thesis argues for the importance of an object-based methodology. It uses the study of individual objects, alongside the vibrant range of documentary evidence and visual sources, to better understand the perception of quality metalware and the impact of the expansion of the trade in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is crucial to look at the artefacts closely to see the aesthetic value of new designs and materials, the use of new technologies, the quality of workmanship, and the marks

displayed on their surface. In doing so, it bridges the gap between economic history and the history of technology and production. It builds on recent research into the ceramics and medicine trades, which considers artefacts in their discussions of the regulation and production of the trade.<sup>5</sup> This methodology will hopefully be used in the study of different industries, to understand the deliberation of quality in their unique material, social and economic contexts.<sup>6</sup> It can also be used to investigate quality in different historical contexts, for example in the nineteenth century, when the mass-production of consumer goods was seen to reduce the quality of metalware.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis has paid particular attention to the marks on objects, including regulated marks such as hallmarks on silver and marks of quality on pewter, as well geographic marks and sponsors' marks that appeared on a range of metalware. Historians have argued that the marks on objects were mainly used for identification, for example Adam Bowett and Laurie Lindey have suggested in their discussion of furniture that marks and labels were primarily used to identify the producer when a product was sold through a retailer, middle-man or broker.<sup>8</sup> However, this thesis has explored the wide understanding of metalware marks in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A contemporary dictionary of 1730 recorded that the term 'to

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<sup>5</sup> Kate Smith, "The Potter's Skill: Perceptions of Workmanship in the English Ceramic Industries, 1760-1800," Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, May 2010; and Jennifer Basford, "A Commodity of Good Names: The Branding of Products, c.1650-1900," Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of York, April 2012.

<sup>6</sup> For example, it could be used to bridge the gap between economic and material culture studies of the leather, textile, furniture, clock and watch, gun, jewellery or scientific instrument trades.

<sup>7</sup> Carnevali, "Golden Opportunities," 275.

<sup>8</sup> Adam Bowett and Laurie Lindey, "Labelled Furniture from the White Swan Workshop in St Paul's Churchyard," *Furniture History* 39 (2003): 80.

mark' meant 'to set a mark on a thing in order to know it again'.<sup>9</sup> This thesis has shown that it was not just the owner of an object who marked it to identify it as their possession. Regulators, producers and retailers also used the marks on metalware to be able to identify the quality of a metal good and its origin of production. These were used across the life-cycle of the object to convey messages about quality. A range of individual and collective marks, that were used formally in the regulation of the trade, but also informally in the customary practices of producers, gave the consumer greater reassurance about a product's quality. Regulators, producers and consumers alike understood that the mark acted as a guarantee, which allowed the consumer to retaliate if the product was substandard.<sup>10</sup> This was emphasised in newspaper articles, publications and trade cards, which allowed regulators and producers to benefit if they developed a reputation for trustworthiness and good-quality metalware.

The expanding means of communication between regulators, producers, retailers and consumers led to an increasing consumer knowledge about metalware. The aforementioned changes in the regulation of the trade, which placed a greater burden of quality enforcement on the consumer, made it more important for the public to understand the regulation and production of the trade, and how to inspect and determine the quality of metalware. At the same time, there was an increasing consumer interest in production and innovation, when consumers sought to expand their knowledge in the wider context of scientific experimentation and intellectual advancement. Producers were able to benefit from this changing perception of quality by producing a wider variety of products, designs and materials and opening the doors

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<sup>9</sup> Nathan Bailey, *Dictionarium Britannicum: Or a More Compleat Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (London, 1730).

<sup>10</sup> George A. Akerlof, "The Market for 'Lemons': Quality Uncertainty and the Market Mechanism," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 84/3 (1970), 500.

of their manufactories to allow the curious public to see first-hand the new technologies and expanding scale of production.

By looking at the movement of people, products and processes between Birmingham, Sheffield and London, the metalware trade can be seen to be in a state of flux, in which the convention of quality and the hierarchy of quality metalware was constantly being debated and deliberated through the making and possessing of metalware. Regulators of the trade provided consumers with the knowledge to understand the regulated standard of quality; producers claimed to be the providers of an increasing variety and quality of metalware; retailers used the marketing and advertising of metalware to emphasise the novelty and fashionability of their goods; and consumers sought out new ways to experience the excitement of the expansion of the trade and possess good-quality metalware. This meant that there was the increasing importance of variety, novelty and innovation, whilst at the same time the intrinsic value of metalware remained paramount. This deliberation of quality was made possible by the knowledge about quality metalware that circulated by word-of-mouth, in print and on the objects themselves.

# **Bibliography**

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SC/GL/TCC/RICCARD, Trade Card of Riccard & Littlefears, 1783.  
SC/GL/TCC/SHRUDER, Trade Card of James Shruder, 1750.  
SC/GL/TCC/SMITH, Trade Card of William Smith, c. 1765.  
SC/GL/TCC/STONEW121, Trade Card of John Stone, 1765.  
SC/GL/TCC/STONEW122, Trade Card of John Stone, 1765.  
SC/GL/TCC/WALKER, Trade Card of John Walker, 1730.  
SC/GL/TCC/WALLER, Trade Card of John Waller, c. 1750.  
SC/GL/TCC/WILLIAMS, Trade Card of Walter Williams.

#### MUSEUM OF LONDON, LONDON

61.39/11, Paul Sandby, 'The Twelve Cries of London', 1760.

#### SHEFFIELD ASSAY OFFICE, SHEFFIELD

Candlestick and Snuffer, Sterling Silver, Fenton, Creswick and Watson, 1772.  
Pair of Candlesticks, Sterling Silver, Robert Jones, 1774.  
Piano Candlesticks, Sterling Silver, Makepiece and Carter, 1776.  
Pair of Salts, Sterling Silver, John Parsons and Charles Hall, 1777.  
Salt Cellar, Sterling Silver, Morton, Warris, Winter and Roberts, 1773.  
Sauce Boats, Sterling Silver, John Hoyland and Co., 1773.

#### SHEFFIELD MILLENIUM GALLERY

##### Metalware

1977.695, Covered Cup, Old Sheffield Plate, c. 1760.  
L.1927.3, Love Cup, Britannia Standard Silver, 1699.



L.1938.316, Plate-warmer, Pewter.

L.1943.97, Taper Candlestick, Sheffield Plate, Boulton and Fothergill, 1770.

#### Trade Cards

2004.1286, Trade Card of Isaiah Kemp, c. 1749-1787.

#### SOHO HOUSE MUSEUM, BIRMINGHAM

Chatelains, Gilt-Metal, Boulton and Fothergill, c. 1765.

#### STERLING SMITH MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

Plate, Pewter, T. Hitchman, 1666.

#### VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON

##### Metalware Department

298:1&2-1864, Watch and Pair Case, c. 1683-96.

LOAN:MET ANON.110:1 to 3-1968, Watch and Pair Case, c. 1750.

M.15-1991, Tankard, c. 1704-1705.

M.26-1964, Tobacco Box, Steel, 1662.

M.100-1920, Skillet, Bronze, John Fathers, 1700.

M.101-1945, Sauce Boat, Pewter, Henry Joseph, London, c. 1780.

M.314-1912, Sauce Boat, Sheffield Plate, 1780.

M.984-1926, Waiter, Pewter, Thomas Bancks, 1685.

#### Prints, Drawings and Paintings Collection

E.46-1949, Trade Card of Hobday, Biddle and Ryder, c. 1750-1800.

P.28-1923, Oil Painting. Pieter van Roestraten. Still life with Silver Tankard, c. 1700.

#### WINTERTHUR MUSEUM, DELAWARE

1961.0830.001, Candlestick, Brass and Iron, George Grove, c. 1748-68.

## UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

### BIRMINGHAM CITY ARCHIVES, BIRMINGHAM

Microfilm A621.1, 'Boulton & Fothergill Pattern Books 1 and 2'.

MS 49/2, 'Letter John Boulton to Matthew Boulton', 10 August 1761.

MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to Jos Banks'.

MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to John Whitehurst'.

MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to Bustamants & Co.', 3 January 1770.

MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book, 1770-3, 'Letter to the Earl of Shelbourne', 7 January 1771.

MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to Mess'rs Wooley Heming', 19 January 1771.

MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to William Matthews', 23 February 1771.

MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to J.G. Griffin Ban', 27 March 1771.

MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to William Matthews', 13 July 1771.

MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to Sir H. Harbord Bast', 26 September 1771.

MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to William Matthews', 30 April 1772.

MS 3782/1/9, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1770-3, 'Letter to the Right Hon'ble Lord Cranborne', 19 January 1773.

MS 3782/1/10, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1774-7, 'Letter Matthew Boulton to Mr Green', 6 August 1774.

MS 3782/1/12/2, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1762-6, 'Letter from Joshua Steele', 29 October 1762.

MS 3782/1/18, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1769, 'Letter from John Markham', 1769.

MS 3782/1/18/18, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1769, 'Letter William Falconer to Matthew Boulton', 12 August 1769.

MS 3782/1/18/25, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1769, 'Bill of items for Messrs D'Olier', 8 September 1769.

MS 3782/1/18/47, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1769, 'Letter Henry Stedman to Boulton & Fothergill', 10 November 1769.

MS 3782/1/18/49, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1769, 'Mr Galton to Matthew Boulton', 17 November 1769.

MS 3782/1/18/53, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1769, 'Letter E. Hallett (Bath) to Messrs Boulton & Fothergill', 27 November 1769.

MS 3782/1/19, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1770, 'Mr Boulton. My Ideas of a Theka in London', 1770.

MS 3782/1/19/2, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1770, 'Letter from the Duke of Richmond,' 3 April 1770.

MS 3782/1/20/3, Boulton & Fothergill Correspondence 1771, 'Letter M. Hobster to Matthew Boulton', 31 March 1771.

MS 3782/12/1/7, Letter Book 1766-8, 'Letter Matthew Boulton to Nathaniel Jeffrys'.

MS 3782/12/1/14, Letter Book 1766-8, 'Letter Matthew Boulton to Mr Kentish', 12 August 1767.

MS 3782/12/1/23, Letter Book 1766-8, 'Letter to Mr John Herman Ebbinghaus', 28 October 1767.

MS 3782/12/1/40, Letter Book 1766-8, 'Letter Matthew Boulton to John Motteux', 23 February 1768.

MS 3782/12/2/11, Letter Book 1768-73, 'Letter from Matthew Boulton to John Taylor', 23 January 1769.

MS 3782/12/2/13, Letter Book 1768-73, 'Letter Matthew Boulton to Mr Solomon Hymen', 23 January 1769

MS 3782/12/2/23, Letter Book 1768-73, 'Letter Matthew Boulton to James Adam', 1 October 1770.

MS 3782/12/2/31, Letter Book 1768-73, 'Draft advertisement for Or moulu'.

MS 3782/12/2/39, Letter Book 1768-73, 'Letter from Matthew Boulton to the Earl of Warwick', November 1772.

MS 3782/12/2/40, Letter Book 1768-73, 'Letter Matthew Boulton to the Duke of Richmond', 4 December 1772.

MS 3782/12/23/33, General Correspondence 1750-73, 'Letter William Allen to Matthew Boulton', 2 April 1764.

MS 3782/12/23/123, General Correspondence 1750-73, 'Letter Apphia Witts to Boulton & Fothergill', 11 November 1768.

MS 3782/12/23/133, General Correspondence 1750-73, 'Letter Mr Falconer to Matthew Boulton', 29 June 1769.

MS 3782/12/23/254, General Correspondence 1750-73, 'Letter S. Darwin to Matthew Boulton', 10 December 1772.

MS 3782/12/23/262, General Correspondence 1750-73, 'Letter Matthew Boulton to John Scale', 1772.

MS 3782/12/72/3, 'Letter John Scale to Matthew Boulton', 23 January 1773.

MS 3782/12/72/118, 'Memorandum by John Scale', 1773.

MS 3782/12/88/11, 'Copy of Petition of Goldsmiths of London Against Sheffield & Birmingham Assay Office Petitions'.

MS 3782/12/88/12, 'Committee on Petitions Relating to Assaying Plate', 18 February 1773.

MS 3782/12/88/13, 'Committee on the Sheffield Assay Petitions', 19 February 1773.

MS 3782/12/88/14, 'Minutes on the Sheffield Assay Petition', 24 February 1773.

MS 3782/12/88/15, 'Committee of Sheffield Assay Petitioners', 26 February 1773.

MS 3782/12/88/36, 'Letter Benjamin May to Matthew Boulton' [Copy Letter Benjamin May to John Carter 1 May 1771], 21 April 1773.

MS 3782/12/88/37, 'Letter Samuel Garbett to Matthew Boulton', 3 May 1773.

MS 3782/12/88/39, 'Copy of Petition of Wardens of the Goldsmiths Company Against the Assay Bill'.

MS 3782/12/88/40, 'Letter Samuel Garbett to Matthew Boulton', 8 May 1773.

MS 3782/12/88/41, 'Letter from Samuel Garbett to Matthew Boulton', 9 May 1773.

MS 3782/12/88/42, 'Letter Samuel Garbett to Matthew Boulton', 25 May 1773.

MS 3782/12/89/1, 'Extracts from Acts of Parliament for Preventing Frauds in Gold and Silver Wares'.

MS 3782/12/89/3, 'Case of the Wardens and Assistants of the Company or Mystery of Goldsmiths of the City of London', 1773.

MS 3782/12/89/4, 'Case of the Goldsmiths, Silversmiths, and Plate Workers of the City of London, and Places Adjacent'.

MS 3782/12/89/5, 'Upon Frauds by London, Birmingham and Sheffield Silversmiths'.

MS 3782/12/89/7, 'Notes on the Standard of Silver'.

MS 3782/12/89/10, 'Considerations upon the Petition of the Workers in Silver in the Towns of Birmingham & Sheffield for an Assayer to be Established in those Places'.

MS 3782/12/89/12, 'Copy Report on the Sheffield and Birmingham Assay Office Petitions', 1773.

MS 3782/12/89/13, 'Reply of the Petitioners from Birmingham and Sheffield to the Cast of the Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Plateworkers of the City of London and Places Adjacent'.

MS 3782/12/89/15, 'Workers in Silver at Birmingham - List of Names'.

MS 3782/12/89/17, 'List of London Silversmiths: Names Who Have Entered Their Marks'.

MS 3782/12/89/18, 'Draft Letter Matthew Boulton to Lord North', 1773.

MS 3782/12/89/23, 'Memorial Relative to Assaying and Marking Wrought Plate at Birmingham, &c.'.

MS 3782/12/89/24, 'An Act for Appointing Wardens and Assay-Masters for Assaying Wrought Plate in the Towns of Sheffield and Birmingham', 1773.

MS 3782/12/105/90, 'A Bill for Amending an Act of the Thirteenth Year of the Rein of His Present Majesty'.

MS 3782/12/107/4, 'Diary', 1769.

MS 3782/12/107/8, 'Diary', 1773.

MS 3782/12/108/5, 'Notebook', 1768-1775.

MS 3782/21/1, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1773, 'Letter to Messrs Robert & Rotton', May 1772.

MS 3782/21/1, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1773, 'Letter to John Aston', 27 March 1773.

MS 3782/21/1, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1773, 'Letter to John Wise', 27 March 1773.

MS 3782/21/1, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1773, 'Letter to Charles & Luke Proctor', 15 April 1773.

MS 3782/21/1, Boulton & Fothergill Letter Book 1773, 'Letter to Messrs Smith & Thomas Merchants', 20 April 1773.

#### BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON

Add MS 34462, Auckland Papers Vol. LI. 'Evidence for a Commercial Treaty with France', 1786.

Add MS 60484 f.14. 'Society for the Encouragement of the Arts: Matthew Boulton, Engineer: Address to the Society', 1800.

#### GUILDHALL LIBRARY, LONDON

MS 05631/1, Worshipful Company of Coopers, 'Mark Book'.

MS 07174, Worshipful Company of Cutlers, 'The Book of Makers' Marks 1606-1704'.

MS 20956, Worshipful Company of Cutlers, 'Bond from Birmingham Cutlers not to use Company Mark', 1665.

MS 16967/7, Worshipful Company of Ironmongers, 'Court Minutes 1685-1705'.

MS 02820, Worshipful Company of Needlemakers, 'Extracts from Ordinances 1668-1875'.

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MS 07090/9, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Orders of Court 1711-1740'.

MS 07091, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Index to the Orders of Court 1691-1740'.

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MS 07104/26, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Rough Court Minutes 1768-1771'.

MS 07116, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Transcripts of Charter and Bye-Laws', 1702.

MS 07118, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'By-Laws Approved Office Copy', 1766.

MS 07119/2, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Charter and Ordinance Book 1699-1873'.

MS 22198/1, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Papers Relating to Country Searches, 1660-1839'.

MS 22201, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Certificates of Assay of Tin', 1651.

MS 22203, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Printed Company Resolutions about the Assize, Weight and Marking of Pewter', 1747.

MS 22214, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'Copy of Grievances Concerning Abuses in the Casting & Assaying', 1674-9.

MS 22218, Worshipful Company of Pewterers, 'List of Subscribers Towards the Cost of a Parliamentary Bill for the Introduction of an Additional Duty', 1755.

MS 03621, Worshipful Company of Pinmakers, 'Petition to Charles II Proposing Partnership with the Crown for Revival of the Trade', c. 1675.

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#### HAMPSHIRE COUNTY ARCHIVES, WINCHESTER

1M44/74, 'Household, Personal and Estate Account Book of 7th Countess of Banbury', 1780-93.

4M52/184, 'Letter to Daniel Dumaresq from Mrs Woodward Widow of the Bishop of Cloyne from Bristol, Sending Ink Stand 'of the Sheffield' Manufacture', 3 November 1770.

12M60/25, 'Inventory of all Household Furniture, Plate, Linen and China of Henry Compton', 1779.

44M69/E8/2/29, 'Blacksmiths/ Metal Working Accounts of Thomas Rampton for Thomas Jervoise', 1734-1735.

202M85/7/7/3, 'Advertisement for Voluntary Subscription to Purchase a Number of Silver, Gold and Pewter Objects', c. 1726.

DC/E4/2/8, 'Letter from Rob[er]t Wells at Aldbourne to the Dean and Chapter with Costed Proposal for Casting a Treble Bell', 22 December 1771.

#### SHEFFIELD ASSAY OFFICE, SHEFFIELD

'Register of Makers Marks', c. 1773-1790.

#### SHEFFIELD CITY ARCHIVES, SHEFFIELD

SAO/2/2/1/2, 'Notes Regarding Parcels Sent for Assay'.

SAO/2/3/1, 'Copies of Letters Relating to the Assay Office in Sheffield'.

SAO/6/1/1/1, 'Rough Day Book 1773-1775'.

#### THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES, KEW

C104/198, Chancery Masters' Exhibits, Fisher v Frost, 'Several of the Inventoryes & Apprisism of Mr Flints Goods', 1699.

C104/221, Chancery Masters' Exhibits, 'Documents Relating to Hancock v Halliday', 1734-1740.

C104/231, Chancery Masters' Exhibits, Whitcombe v Webster, 'Auction Catalogues Relating to Properties, Businesses, Land and Household Contents in London and Middlesex'.

C105/5, Chancery Masters' Exhibits, Braithwaite v Taylor, 'Accounts of Administrator of Martha Braithwaite and Inventories', 1746.

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FO27/19, 'Letters and Papers from William Eden', Vol. 1, 1786.

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G.II.I.4., 'Notices from the *London Gazette*,' 1768-1773.

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G.II.II.4., 'Minute Book of a Special Committee for Parliament Business', 1737.

G.II.II.5., 'Committee on the Assay Office', 1773.

G.II.IV.2., 'Counsels Opinion as Two Cases Involving Fraudulent Attempts to Obtain the Co Marks on Counterfeit Articles', 1767-1769.

H.I.I., 'Address of the Wardens and Assistants of the Co of Goldsmiths to the King James II', 1687.

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## **OLD BAILEY PROCEEDINGS**

December 1677, trial of unnamed defendant (t16771212-4).

April 1715, trial of Elizabeth Trott (t17150427-8).

April 1715, trial of unnamed defendant (t17150427-19).

September 1715, trial of unnamed defendant (t17150907-8).

May 1724, trial of Peter Burgess (t17240521-22).

August 1728, trial of Edward Roberts (t17280828-49).

May 1732, trial of Mary Bradley (t17320525-4).

September 1732, trial of Charles Patrick and William Meads (t17320906-26).

January 1735, trial of Jane Heybourn (t17350116-47).

October 1741, trial of Robert Ramsey (t17411014-4).

January 1743, trial of William Smith (t17430114-49).

June 1743, trial of Richard Warwick et. al. (t17430629-39).

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